

## Getting USAF back in focus; Mending fences; The A-10 a vertical cut?; An opportunity for industry; Better Buying Power 2.0 ....

### MEET THE NEW BOSS

Deborah L. James, nominated to be the new Secretary of the Air Force, didn't even have the job before getting a taste of USAF's strained relationship with members of Congress, who are still smarting over service-proposed Guard and Reserve force structure changes.

James, who was nominated for the post in August, had a fairly controversy-free Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing Sept. 19, which was dominated by questions about the Air Force's recent experience with sexual assaults within the ranks. Commenting broadly on the topic under questioning from SASC chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.), James said she thinks USAF simply "lost focus" on the issue before last year's headline-grabbing assaults at basic training emerged.

She thinks the Air Force can get the problem under control, noting "the military has been extraordinarily effective through the chain of command when there is persistent ... unrelenting focus." She noted success in combating resistance to racial integration and drug use during the Vietnam War as examples of such achievements, and again in the last couple of years with the repeal of 'Don't ask, Don't tell.'

But the "consistency of focus" was lacking, probably because "there were wars, there were other things that captured that focus." James pledged, if she got the job, to "keep that focus strong."

James has been a member of the Defense Department's Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) for several years. In written answers to the SASC questions provided before the hearing, she noted "there appears to be steady and positive progress" on sexual assaults in the Air Force, and "there has not been an allegation of recent military training instructor sexual misconduct for more than 13 months."

In her testimony, she apparently said the right things about the Total Force. She was complimented by Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Ala.) for acknowledging in written answers that fiscal 2013 decisions made regarding Total Force proposals were made, as Wicker paraphrased, "without adequate consultation of the various stakeholders who are now feeling the negative impacts of the plan's implementation." James told Wicker she is a "deep believer in the value of the Total Force" and "it's painful to me to see some of the frictions that have been happening between the air components." In a previous Pentagon job as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, James used to think of the Air Force as the "superstars of the Guard and Reserve," because of the way USAF integrated and utilized the reserve component.

"I still think ... so," she added, but "clearly, ... there are fences to be mended" with the Guard, Reserve and states, and "we need to do some work, here."

James has spent the last nine years as an executive with Science Applications International Corp., and had previously served with United Technologies as a vice president for international operations and marketing. She had the reserve job at the Pentagon from 1993 to 1998, and before that was on the staff of the House Armed Services Committee. She



*James looks to mend Total Force fences.*

would be the second woman to serve as Secretary of the Air Force—Sheila Widnall was the first, from 1993 to 1997—and would succeed Michael B. Donley, who retired in June.

James promised to come up with a Total Force plan, if confirmed, that would be coordinated with Congress, "which will basically meet the country's needs, as well as the states' needs" to be able to respond to disasters. She added, though, that she's "equally sure that we will have to take reductions."

The hearing was barely over, however, before a hold was placed on James' nomination by Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), because the Air Force wasn't answering the senator's questions about potential plans to eliminate some entire fleets of aircraft, including the A-10 fighter. Ayotte had read USAF leader public comments about the possible elimination of the A-10, KC-10, and other fleets and asked the Air Force—before James' confirmation hearing—to explain itself. Ayotte's husband is a former A-10 combat pilot.

During the hearing, Ayotte said she was "concerned" that "there already has been a decision made on the A-10," and said she had spoken with James about it before the hearing. The A-10 "has a very important function in terms of close air support," Ayotte maintained, noting that in July, "60 soldiers were saved in Afghanistan" by A-10s.

James' answer was that USAF hadn't made a final decision about the A-10. During the hearing, she said, "if we are going to eliminate an entire aircraft, which is currently serving a particular mission, we'd better be sure that we've got something

else that will serve that mission in the interim until one of the futuristic programs comes online.”

Unsatisfied by the lack of answers from USAF, Ayotte submitted more A-10 questions on Sept. 23, and when she didn't get prompt answers, put James' nomination on hold the next day.

The Air Force said through a spokesperson that the A-10 answers had been provided in late September and the hold was lifted in mid-October.

The possibility that USAF would make the A-10 one of its “vertical” cuts in order to live within sequestration dollars was a hot issue at AFA's Air & Space Conference in September. Both Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III and Air Combat Command chief Gen. G. Michael Hostage III said they would prefer to keep the jet—Welsh said he “loves” it, having flown the A-10 for more than 1,000 hours—but the fact that it doesn't have applicability to many missions beyond CAS makes it vulnerable if budget shortfalls force a fleet reduction.

Hostage echoed the A-10 remarks and said the same thing about the MC-12 Liberty and the full fleet of medium-altitude remotely piloted aircraft. In a press conference, however, Hostage acknowledged that whether or not eliminating these fleets is a good approach to managing the financial crisis doesn't matter; what matters, he said, is whether Congress “will let us do it.”

## KEEP THE BOMBER SOLD

Even given the profound money challenges facing the Air Force, the need for a new long-range (LRS-B) strike bomber—a project not yet even in the competition stage—has been voiced from the very top of the defense establishment. It will be essential, however, to keep making the case for the bomber, because that resolve could wane as the largely secret project takes time and presents a big price tag, said retired Lt. Gen. Mark D. Shackelford, who spoke at a panel discussion on long-range strike during AFA's Air & Space Conference.

“Thus far, the rhetorical environment has been very supportive of the [LRS-B] in spite of various budget ... issues,” said Shackelford, who was the former military deputy for USAF acquisition. “Trying to keep the program sold, both as a service and as industry competitors, is going to be critical for quite some time.”

As a nation, “we have a tendency to walk away from long-term acquisitions,” Shackelford observed. After an investment of about \$45 billion each, the B-2 bomber and the F-22 fighter were terminated far short of their planned production, at just 21 and 187 aircraft, respectively.

“That's why it's going to be important to continue to advocate the importance of this to the nation, even once we get started,” he said. The Air force already has begun such an advocacy campaign on the F-35, he noted.

Shackelford, who had a ringside seat for the short life of the next generation bomber, which was canceled by former Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, said industry will have to deal with new Pentagon buying rules and conditions on this new project.

To begin with, he said, industry needs to “bridge until such time that funding starts to flow” on the project. Apparently, it was supposed to get started early in calendar 2014, but “I don't think I'd look forward to a first quarter award,” chiefly due to sequestration.

Secondly, he warned not to assume that the acquisition methods applied in competing and selecting the KC-46 tanker, though “wildly successful” for the government, will hold on the bomber.

“Context is king,” he said, and the tanker was viewed as largely an off-the-shelf development program. Consequently, that program was structured as a fixed-price development,



Illustration by Erik Simonsen

**Context is key when it comes to the long-range strike bomber.**

but “I think we'll walk away” from such an approach on the bomber, even though defense leaders emphasize it will be an effort of “integration, not ... innovation.”

Shackelford said to expect “a great deal of tension in the cost estimating.” New Pentagon acquisition rules expressed in the Better Buying Power 2.0 initiative place heavy emphasis on making good assumptions early on, he said. These will shape “how the government frames its evaluation of cost.”

The government will focus on understanding risk, he said. “The trend these days is to get as mature a starting point as you can ... to reduce the risk that leads to cost and schedule increases over time,” he said.

There will likely be a threshold level of requirements that contractors must meet, and then, a slender amount of money available for going beyond the minimum need, Shackelford postulated, adding that industry probably won't be told how much additional margin they have.

Whereas in the past the tendency has been for government to “pick the most glittering proposal that they thought they could afford,” the LRS-B will have a hard unit cost ceiling. That number—the one quoted is \$550 million each—is “what the government's willing to pay.” While there will be points given if contractors can pack more capability in for that price, if the Pentagon “can't get the additional capability within the dollars they have available, they won't pay for it.”

Here, he said, industry has “a real opportunity” to get ahead by investing its own money in risk-reduction. The government “won't ask for company investment,” Shackelford said, but “will very definitely reward the companies or company that comes forward with a low-risk technical proposal” with capabilities beyond threshold that “without actually expecting government to pay for it.”

Based on the evidence of recent acquisitions, “he who invests improves his likelihood of winning,” Shackelford asserted.

Expect the program manager of the LRS-B to be under the direct supervision of the undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology, and logistics, he said, given the “national significance” of the program. Moreover, progress payments will likely not come at “some event, like a preliminary design review,” but with the delivery of a physical piece of equipment “that you can actually look at and say, ‘Yeah, we got something for our dollar, here.’”

Better Buying Power 2.0 “will leave industry in a challenging position as individual competitors judge what technology, at what risk, and what cost they're prepared to propose, perhaps with little firm insight into how the government is actually going to make the selection,” he said. ■