

In his confirmation hearing, the new Secretary of the Air Force answered an array of questions from Congress.

Whit Peters on the Issues

F. Whitten Peters is the 19th Secretary of the Air Force, having been confirmed in that post after serving as the acting Secretary for nearly two years. On July 21, 1999, Peters appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Following are excerpts from his answers to questions asked by panel members.

The Global Fighter Problem

“The technology exists in the world today, in the Su-35 and some of the other [former] Soviet airplanes, which were sold around the world, to defeat the F-15. And, in fact, five years from now in a contest between the F-15 and an Su-35 in the hands of a competent pilot, the F-15 would be shot down. The F-15 would not be able to see the Su-35 before it was shot out of the air. That is the problem that we have. We have aircraft which are today at parity but five years from now will be at a disadvantage.”

Emerging SAM Threats

“The other really important threat, which we saw in Kosovo, is the very widespread distribution of sophisticated air defense systems. The F-22 is the only aircraft that we currently have in inventory which, unassisted, can take out an SA-10 [Surface-to-Air Missile] or an SA-12 without itself being in grave risk. And I think that’s the threat we are most worried about. Those systems are on the world market, they’re available for sale, and have been sold in places

like—Cyprus for example just bought SA-10s—They’re in places like Iran. So that threat is out there.”

F-22 and JSF Synergy

“There has been much discussion ... about whether the Joint Strike Fighter could perform the same role [as the F-22], and the answer is, it really cannot.

“The Joint Strike Fighter is affordable in large numbers because it is optimized for the air-to-ground role. That doesn’t mean that it can’t shoot down other airplanes. It can. But by comparison, the Joint Strike Fighter will carry two air-to-air missiles. The F-22 will carry six, even when it is carrying other bombs. So, the firepower of the F-22 is much greater. The altitude at which the F-22 can effectively operate is much greater, and the maneuverability at altitude is much greater.

“So, for all of these reasons if we were to take F-22 out of the inventory we would be looking at a massive change of direction, it seems to me, on Joint Strike Fighter, at least on the Air Force piece of the Joint Strike Fighter.”

The F-22 Assumption

"All of the tactical air—not only Air Force, but Navy and Marine fixed-winged air as well—is built around the assumption that we will have an aircraft like the F-22 10 to 15 years from now which can operate in a very high-threat environment in the very early days of any conflict. ...

"Serbia [was] able to track and fire upon an F-117 aircraft, one of our stealth aircraft, you know, our first-generation stealth. F-22 brings fourth- or fifth-generation stealth to the battlefield. Coupled with its very high speed and its ability to operate at very high altitudes, it is much more defensible against the modern air-to-ground threat that the Soviet Union has created and which is readily available in the world market."

The B-2 and Other Bombers

"We continue to see the B-2 as an absolutely critical platform. As you can see from what happened in the war, it has the capability to strike from the United States to anywhere around the globe, and it has the capability to strike very precisely. Indeed, the JDAMs [Joint Direct Attack Munitions] that came off the B-2 were among the most precise weapons we can drop.

"We see that as an absolutely critical capability in future warfare. We also need the B-1 and the B-52 to follow up. In the early days of the war, when we need to get the tight spots and you need to get into a defended environment, the B-2 and, ultimately, the F-22 are the two platforms that can do that."

Pilot Retention

"One of the few bright spots [regarding] the retention and recruiting field that we have is that we are, in fact, retaining about 43 percent of our pilots who are coming up for the first time for the bonus. We have had no trouble recruiting pilots, even though we have gone to a 10-year active duty service commitment. My sense is that the greatest problem we have with all of our forces, and particularly pilots, is the optempo, that going to EAF [Expeditionary Aerospace Force] will help that.

"The other problem we have is that the pilot bonuses stop at the 14-year point, and all of a sudden people are leaving at the 14-year point. We need

to restructure that bonus, in our view, so it goes through the colonel level, [the] O-6 level, and continues out to at least 20 years. ...

"The difficulty we have is that you can be forced out of that by too much work and too little pay. So everything we can do to even out the optempo, which is what we're working on, and increase the pay to be more competitive, helps pilots stay."

Anthrax Vaccination

"It [opposition to the vaccination program] is, in fact, a very important problem. It's really our problem to educate our forces on the anthrax vaccine. We think that anthrax is one of the most lethal threats we face. It has been weaponized, and we know it is deployed in about 10 countries around the world. Our view is that it is unconscionable to allow our pilots and aircrews to fly into those countries, which are high-threat countries, without being inoculated against anthrax, just as we would inoculate people against smallpox.

"We have not gone into this without great thought. ... We believe that it is, in fact, a safe vaccine and that our burden is to convince all of our fine pilots and aircrews and men and women in the Air Force, and particularly the air component, that it is both safe and effective and there is a need. I think people understand that if you get anthrax, ... you are effectively dead."

Pay, Benefits, Retention

"When we survey Air Force men and women who leave the force, inadequate pay and inadequate retirement benefits are always high up on the list of reasons that they have left the Air Force, so certainly one of the best solutions—in fact, the best solution—to recruiting shortfalls is to retain more of our highly trained and highly skilled men and women."

The Two-War Force?

"I think everyone has agreed that what we did in Kosovo was equivalent to a single Major Theater War. The impact of that on our forces is, first of all, to tire people out and, second, to tire equipment out. Much of the equipment we had over there had some deferred maintenance with it. Another thing that happened was we were required to shut down a fair

amount of training, actually. So we need a period of time to get our people back up to the level they need to be.

"Now, having said that, during the time in Kosovo, one of the reasons we did the Stop-Loss order was to make sure that we could operate, essentially, simultaneously in Kosovo, Southwest Asia, and Korea if it came [to] that. And we do have forces that we basically lock down at their home base so that they can stay trained and ready so that if we had another MRC [Major Regional Conflict] we could, in fact, respond."

Few in Number, Ridden Hard

"One of my continuing concerns is that we have these things called low density-high demand assets, like the U-2. And the pilots of the U-2 are never home because today it is not two Major Theater Wars we usually do. It is global surveillance in five, six, seven locations simultaneously. And we will not be able to afford enough Joint STARS [Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System aircraft] to do that.

"So, we need to start looking at other platforms which are consistent with the optempo of the people who have to fly them, or work with them, [that] can give us this kind of global awareness capability. That's why I had thought the Discoverer II program was an important science and technology program to look to see if we could do that in space affordably. We are also [looking] at UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles] to see whether they could be used to supplement Joint STARS."

Stress on the F-117

"The -117 community is really one of the hardest-tasked communities we have. Those pilots tend to be away from home—I suspect this year it will be over 200 days. We really don't have a current substitute for F-117, and ... it is really a weapon of choice because it can operate very early in a battle area when the IAD [Integrated Air Defense] system is still up and running.

"We have a long-term solution in our view. [It] is the F-22 and Joint Strike Fighter, both of which can take on some of the roles that the F-117 has today, and obviously the B-2 has now taken some of the role as well. But for now, we are trying to look

for ways to use those other forces, but I think it's only really probably a long-term solution. ...

"I think the EAF construct will help somewhat on that, but because of the uniqueness of that asset, it will be difficult."

Expeditionary Aerospace Force

"We need to get there [to the EAF format]. Gen. [Michael E.] Ryan and I ... set Oct. 1 of this year as the point where we're going to go into a full expeditionary aerospace structure, which means that we will take our force and divide it into roughly 10 pieces, and that people will be on rotation [with] those 10 pieces, kind of like a carrier battle group or one of the Marine Corps expeditionary groups.

"The purpose of that is multifold. One is to make sure that people are trained for the area in which they are going and, second, to make sure that people can get a much more stable and predictable life. And ultimately, it will allow us to reduce optempo, we believe, as we demonstrate we can get out there and do the work and then come home. Key components of that are C-17 and satellite communications, all the things you saw us use in Kosovo, where we actually set up 14 expeditionary bases, from the Budapest airport to tent cities in Aviano to tent cities in other spots in Italy."

More Fighters, Troops

"We are going to move out as EAFs number one and two on the first of October, and this is really an experiment to make sure we kind of know what we're doing. Then, the first of January, EAF three and four will move out.

"Right now, there are no real financial barriers to doing this. Ultimately, there is going to be a cost, and we realize as we've done this that we are going to need some additional equipment. We started to purchase an additional F-16 Block 50s, which is one of the costs. We see we need additional manpower, which will be another cost, but, at this point, there is no barrier to moving out."

C-130J Program

"Nobody wants the demise of the C-130J program. We clearly need to buy -130Js at some point, and we clearly need to avoid shooting ourselves in

the foot by allowing the line down there to close. But as I say, we have been pushing very hard on Lockheed. I have personally met with Lockheed, I guess, over the last 20 months, a number of times to say, 'Look, there are no international sales. This is all I can afford. You'd better get your act together and be able to run at a profit on what we can afford.' And I think they pretty much got in there. ... We now are where we think we can really try to work a program with Lockheed that is affordable, if you look at Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and all the other requirements for the -130. And that's really now the next issue: to try to work that out."

The C-130X

"We need to move to a common configuration of the C-130 aircraft, which we call the C-130X. That is basically an aircraft with a completely new electrical system and digital avionics. That program will go into its first engineering contract later this year. Ultimately, we see that we will put those avionics modernization items into all those C-130s which still have life left in them. A C-130 has a lifetime of over 30,000 hours, and most of them are not over 20,000 hours to date. So we foresee having 400 or 500 in the current fleet, in that modernization profile. We also see buying the -130J to replace those aircraft which are really too far gone to warrant being improved."

Slighting Space?

"We have had studies for the last 10 years [on] how to do space. I finally put together a team and said, 'Go out and read all the studies and tell me what we actually should do. Let's go do something and stop studying it.'

"Over the period since the Berlin Wall fell, our budget has gone down about 40 percent, but our space budget has gone up 3 percent, at the same time that tac air, lift, housing, and everything else has gone down by 40 percent. So I think it is not fair to say we have a program which has favored nonspace activities. Space is, in fact, I believe, our only single growth area in terms of total budget expenditure."

Space Based Lasers

"We doubled our contribution, and we worked with BMDO [Ballistic Missile Defense Organization] to

double its contribution to Space Based Laser in the '00 budget to try to come up with a program which our technical people, our outside advisors, tell me was an executable program. ... What we tried to put together, in discussions with folks on the Hill who care about this a lot, was a program which was executable and which in my view would produce technology that would be more closely akin to what could actually be fielded.

"I know that there are views up here that we should go another way, and that is try to move faster with what we currently have and then do the development afterwards. We certainly are willing to listen to those views."

Air and Space Integration

"We need to look hard at the organization of our personnel in space. I think many in the Colorado Springs [Colo.] area [where US and Air Force Space Commands are located] are very attracted to a separate space force, but General Ryan and I feel it is actually more attractive to the nation, and more attractive to those men and women, that we integrate them with the rest of the Air Force. We've been trying very hard to do that.

"We've had an aerospace integration program ongoing for over a year. One of the early fruits of that program was the ability to target [Serbian targets] right off of Predator video, which required us to merge Predator video with national satellite data, moving electrons up and through space very quickly to be able to actually target what the Predator was seeing in a matter of minutes—or, indeed, seconds, by the time we really got it up and working.

"So space, in our view, is one of the places that we need to be working. It needs to be integrated with a few other components."

USAF the Key in Space

"We have 90 percent of the people in DoD and in national defense in general who work in space. We spend 85 percent of the budget that is spent on national security space, and with [the National Reconnaissance Office], our partner, we spend about 95 percent of the budget that has been spent on space. Both NRO's budget and our budget, as I said, have been increased in a time of general declines. There's no question that the future lies in space for many applications." ■