

# The Contact Sport Senior Leaders Must Play

*I encourage every member of the military to take on the mantle of fearless, thoughtful, but loyal dissent when the situation calls for it.*

—Dr. Robert M. Gates, 2008

*Proper stewardship of air and space power requires Airmen not only to push the limits in combat but also to emphasize, publically and frequently, what is special and vital about air and space power. No one else can be counted on to do it.*

—Dr. Rebecca Grant, 2006

As our nation transitions to a new presidential administration, military, government, and academic professionals concerned with defense matters have an opportunity and a responsibility to contribute ideas that protect our nation's citizens and interests. As denizens of air, space, and cyberspace, Airmen like to think of themselves as occupying the proverbial "high ground." But in national security policy battles, Airmen frequently are not sufficiently embedded in the intellectual processes that define our nation's security strategy today and in the coming years. The results are—and will be—strategies and policies that fail to exploit air, space, and cyberspace power as fully as they might. This is not just a parochial, service battle; the best interests of the nation are truly at stake.

What can Airmen do about it? Well-reasoned advocacy and, especially, professional writing are critical. For its part, Air University has rejuvenated *Air and Space Power Journal* and founded the *Strategic Studies Quarterly* as well as the e-publication, *The Wright Stuff*. Additionally, Air University has strengthened its efforts to develop advanced writing skills.<sup>1</sup> As a result, more Airmen are articulating and sharing their ideas. Beyond service publications, the work of some Airmen is appearing in such important venues as *Armed Forces Journal*, *Parameters*, and the US Naval Institute's *Proceedings*.

We should applaud these vital initiatives while recognizing that there is still more work to be done. Specifically, conspicuous by their absence are a plethora of frank articles by senior Airmen addressing national and international security issues at the highest levels.<sup>2</sup> This needs to change.

Of course, Airmen have more to offer than merely better ways of employing certain platforms in selected dimensions. Ideally, they have internalized a strategic vision that could be said to reflect an “airminded” approach to national security issues generally, that is, what Gen Henry H. “Hap” Arnold termed the Airman’s “particular expertise and distinct point of view.”<sup>3</sup> This is one of the strengths of our national defense architecture—in creating a central Department of Defense after World War II, our leaders sought to create an institution that could leverage the strengths of each service’s perspectives. According to Air Force doctrine, an Airman’s “perspective is necessarily different; it reflects the range, speed, and capabilities of aerospace forces.”<sup>4</sup> Such a unique perspective would seem to be invaluable given the perplexing dynamics of twenty-first-century security challenges. If it is important that air-mindedness be included in the national discussion, senior Air Force officers should be part of the professional dialogue that finds its way into influential journals and other outlets.

There are many examples of the proper way to engage openly in public debate about defense policy. The classic example is Gen Colin Powell. Prof. Michael Desch points out that while still serving as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Powell “published an opinion piece in *The New York Times* and an essay in *Foreign Affairs* arguing against” the humanitarian intervention policy of President Clinton.<sup>5</sup> According to Desch, Powell advocated “on behalf of more restrictive criteria for the use of force, which became known as the Powell Doctrine.”<sup>6</sup> Despite the ensuing controversy, both pieces proved to be influential, and Powell’s career hardly suffered.

Gen David H. Petraeus penned a number of articles, including a much critiqued op-ed in the *Washington Post*.<sup>7</sup> In that essay, then-Lieutenant General Petraeus claimed that Iraqi security forces were making great progress in developing their capability, a conclusion that “was criticized as an overly optimistic portrait.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, because it appeared shortly before the elections, some detractors viewed it as “blatantly political.”<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, Petraeus was promoted again despite the controversy.

Gen Peter W. Chiarelli, the Army’s current vice chief of staff, has a collection of scholarly yet provocative writings.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, he published them as a colonel, major general, and lieutenant general. As a full general, he continues to appear at widely attended open forums, where he offers fresh thinking that challenges the status quo and then subjects himself to on-the-record questions.<sup>11</sup> He is something of a model of the Rooseveltian

archetype of the man who willingly puts himself “in the arena” to advocate his ideas.<sup>12</sup>

Examples of intellectual leadership at the senior level also exist in the Air Force. Consider the uncompromisingly frank article by the Air Force’s current chief of staff, “Don’t Go Downtown without Us: The Role of Joint Aerospace Power in Urban Operations,” which he wrote as a lieutenant general.<sup>13</sup> Among other things, then-Lt Gen Norton A. Schwartz and his co-author challenged those who viewed urban operations as necessarily “extremely manpower intensive, with a focus on seizing and occupying urban terrain, close-quarters infantry combat, and ‘low-tech’ solutions to urban battle-space management.”<sup>14</sup>

General Schwartz instead argued for a vigorously joint approach that leveraged airpower’s unique features. In doing so he forthrightly—and presciently—argued that “by using this approach, one may control an adversary without necessarily introducing a large ground-combat force, thus minimizing casualties while achieving the desired effect.”<sup>15</sup> He also included a blunt warning that the “failure to bring the advantages inherent in joint aerospace power to bear against our adversaries in the urban environment puts operational success seriously at risk.”<sup>16</sup>

What is especially remarkable about this essay is that it was written in 2000, well before US forces began their struggle in Iraq. Interestingly, it was not until the United States fully embraced in 2007 the very concepts General Schwartz wrote about seven years earlier that it began to achieve real success in its Iraq operations. The five-fold increase in air strikes in 2007,<sup>17</sup> along with the “staggering” increase in the demand for aerial intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR), is ample evidence that he and his co-author were advocating the right approach—and did so long before it became popular.<sup>18</sup>

Importantly, Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley seems to be encouraging Airmen to engage. At the Air Force Association meeting in the fall of 2008 he said:

[W]e need to be prepared to engage—and if necessary debate—the major issues facing our Air Force. Good stewardship demands developing a deep understanding of the macro-level trends affecting the Air Force. . . . As we do so, we will cultivate reasoned, carefully considered perspectives. We will be able to present these views not by digging in or staking out turf, but from a careful analysis and a seasoned appreciation of the many joint and national influences affecting today’s strategic decision making.<sup>19</sup>

Of particular note in the secretary’s exhortation is his emphasis on “developing a deep understanding of the macro-trends.”<sup>20</sup> Too many military personnel

have immense knowledge of their functional areas but rather less familiarity of the larger political, social, and economic contexts in which our nation calls upon the military to engage. Secretary Donley, in essence, is pointing out the need for officers to “do their homework” to be able to express “reasoned [and] carefully considered perspectives.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is imperative that those of us involved in formulating and executing national security policy educate ourselves *broadly* about our service and our agencies, about other services, and about national security matters writ large.

Advocacy is not, however, a risk-free enterprise; it is an intellectual contact sport of the first order. Leaders should expect their views to be hotly contested. In many instances the counterpoints will be expressed thoughtfully and at length—but also unsparingly.<sup>22</sup> Such exchanges nevertheless can be productive, because it is often through engaging opposing perspectives that truth can emerge. Spirited debate is a hallmark of America’s military success.<sup>23</sup> Other times, the feedback is markedly less civil. In an era of anonymous blogs, it is especially easy for nameless detractors to spew venom without accountability. This new anonymity runs counter to the core value of integrity that is common to all our services.

Unquestionably, advocating a particular service perspective (or even just suggesting, for example, that issues ought to be analyzed in an air-minded way that may not even call for the use, *per se*, of airpower) just might result in dire career consequences.<sup>24</sup> It may require a certain kind of courage, especially for line officers aspiring to attain senior leadership positions, to take up the ordeal that advocacy can become.

There are, of course, different kinds of courage: physical and moral courage. In his study of military heroism, Max Hastings concludes that “physical bravery is found more often than the spiritual variety. *Moral courage is rare*” (emphasis added).<sup>25</sup> Our military is blessed in that Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines seldom lack for physical courage; it is moral courage that is needed today. Summoning moral courage is not as easy or as simple as it might sound. The reality for senior officers is that their advocacy puts more than just the individual officer at risk. It is the family, as well as all of those within the organization who are looking to that person for leadership and mentorship, who will likely suffer if a penalty is to be paid.

For all the well-intentioned rhetoric about encouraging “out of the box” thinking, it is naive to believe that the “system” necessarily protects innovators or intellectual iconoclasts. Being “right” is no insurance policy either.<sup>26</sup> In the real world, happy endings are not guaranteed. In his speech

to the Air War College in the spring of 2008, Secretary Gates was candid about this truth.<sup>27</sup> Using the legendary Air Force reformer Col John Boyd as a “historical exemplar,” the secretary eulogized Boyd’s contributions to airpower thinking while recognizing that he was “a brilliant, eccentric, and stubborn character” who engendered much resistance in the Air Force’s bureaucracy.

The secretary made no secret about the potential career cost for the kind of “principled, creative, [and] reform-minded” Air Force leaders need today. He quoted Boyd with approval as saying:

One day you will take a fork in the road, and you’re going to have to make a decision about which direction you want to go. If you go [one] way, you can be somebody. You will have to make compromises and you will have to turn your back on your friends. But you will be a member of the club and you will get promoted and get good assignments. Or you can go [the other] way and you can do something—something for your country and for your Air Force and for yourself. . . . If you decide to do something, you may not get promoted and you may not get good assignments and you certainly will not be a favorite of your superiors. But you won’t have to compromise yourself. . . . To be somebody or to do something. In life there is often a roll call. That’s when you have to make a decision. To be or to do?<sup>28</sup>

There is even more to be gleaned from this speech to up-and-coming Air Force officers. Consider that the lengthy quote from Boyd was juxtaposed with an expression of frustration about “people” being “stuck in old ways of doing business” who made it like “pulling teeth” to get more intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets onto the battlefield.<sup>29</sup>

Who were the “people” he was speaking about? By simply paraphrasing Boyd, one can easily conclude that the “people” to which the secretary was alluding in his speech were the ones who were “members of the club,” who received “good assignments,” who were the “favorites of their superiors,” and who, therefore, were “promoted.” A damning indictment that ought to trouble all senior officers. In truth, it is a call to action.


The entire Department of Defense—and our nation—is at a critical juncture. Unless the full potential of the investments we have made in airpower, land power, and sea power—in all their many dimensions—is understood by key decision makers and the whole joint team, the nation will be denied the fullest ability to defend itself and its interests. I previously tried to explain why this is such a vital concern for Airmen—and for all senior leaders:

Leaders need to lead. In the case of generals especially, that sometimes means speaking and writing about doctrines which they find ill-serve the Nation by failing to fully utilize the capabilities of the whole joint team.

Why do I feel so strongly about this? In my nearly 33 years of service I've experienced some terrible things—I can still recall, for example, the stench of rotting corpses in Somalia. Yet the most heartbreaking scene I've personally witnessed was at the Dover AFB mortuary. To see the bodies of young American Soldiers neatly laid out in their dress uniforms—but forever to be silent—is something that will haunt me forever. Do not we—all of us—owe such heroes our level best to try to find a better way?<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to what some may think, making an intellectual case from service perspectives is not about garnering slices of “budget pies;” rather, it is about devising ways to avoid putting young Americans at unnecessary risk. As General Schwartz put it in 2000, for example, airpower can be exploited so that “one may control an adversary without necessarily introducing a large ground-combat force.”<sup>31</sup> In those circumstances where we can do so, we maximize the chance that our precious Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guard members can come home safely to their friends and families. That, however, requires robust and thoughtful advocacy of what airpower—and land power and sea power—can contribute to the joint fight.

Senior officers must lead the effort—at whatever personal cost. If not them, then who? As Dr. Rebecca Grant insists, “No one else can be counted on to do it.”<sup>32</sup>



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#### Notes

1. See for example, Lt Gen Allen G. Peck, *AU Blue Dart System*, <https://augateway.maxwell.af.mil/bluedart/>.

2. There are some exceptions. See for example, Lt Gen David Deptula, “Air and Space Power, Lead Turning, the Future,” *Orbis*, (Fall 2008): 585.

3. See Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Operations and Organization* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 3 April 2007), 2, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/service\\_pubs/afdd2.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/service_pubs/afdd2.pdf).

4. Ibid.

5. Michael C. Desch, “Bush and the Generals,” *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 3 (May/June 2007), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070501faessay86309/michael-c-desch/bush-and-the-generals.html>.

6. Ibid.

7. David H. Petraeus, "Battling for Iraq," *Washington Post*, 25 September 2004, B7, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A49283-2004Sep25.html>.

8. See Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs/Perseus Publishing, 2008), 76. Robinson writes that although Petraeus "staunchly defended" the accuracy of the op-ed, he "reluctantly came to regret publishing it due to the controversy it generated."

9. See for example, Danny Kampf, "Petraeus and the Politicization of the Military," *Daily Colonial*, George Washington University, 17 September 2007, <http://www.dailycolonial.com/go.dc?p=3&cs=4452>.

10. See for example, Peter W. Chiarelli, "Beyond Goldwater-Nichols," *Joint Force Quarterly*, issue no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 71–81, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq\\_pubs/jfq1102.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq_pubs/jfq1102.pdf); Maj Gen Peter W. Chiarelli and Maj Patrick R. Michaelis, "Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full-Spectrum Operations," *Military Review* (July–August 2005): 4–17, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awgate/milreview/chiarelli.pdf>; and Lt Gen Peter W. Chiarelli with Maj Stephen M. Smith, "Learning From Our Modern Wars: The Imperatives of Preparing for a Dangerous Future," *Military Review* (September–October 2007): 2–15, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/SepOct07/chialleriengseptoct07.pdf>.

11. See for example, *Officership in Time of War*, Center for a New American Security panel discussion, Washington, DC, 1 October 2008, <http://www.cnas.org/events/inatimeofwar/>.

12. The man "in the arena" is a reference to Theodore Roosevelt's classic:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt, *Man in the Arena*, speech, 23 April 1910, <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/4758.html>.

13. Lt Gen Norton A. Schwartz and Col Robert B. Stephan, "Don't Go Downtown without Us: The Role of Joint Aerospace Power in Urban Operations," *Aerospace Power Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 3–11, <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj00/spr00/schwartz.pdf>.

14. *Ibid.*, 5.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 11.

17. See for example, Anthony H. Cordesman, *US Airpower in Iraq and Afghanistan: 2004–2007* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13 December 2007), [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071213\\_oif-oef\\_airpower.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071213_oif-oef_airpower.pdf).

18. See for example, "Some Staggering Data," *Air Force Association Daily Report*, 7 April 2008, <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/DRArchive/Pages/default.aspx>, specifically:

For those of us wondering about the importance of overhead intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to the ongoing fight, here are some illuminating numbers told to the *Daily Report* by Air Combat Command. Airborne ISR sensors monitored 60

targets in calendar year 2001 for change detection—to observe deviations over time that might indicate threat developments, such as variations in roadside pavement that might warn of the recent planting of a roadside bomb. In 2007, that number grew to 70,542, a whopping increase of 117,470 percent, according to ACC spokesman Maj Tom Crosson. RQ/MQ-1 Predator unmanned aerial vehicles logged 4,380 hours in the air in 2001, providing overhead streaming video to support ground forces. In 2007, that number rose to 63,186 hours, he said. Further, E-8C Joint STARS tracked 12,000 moving targets in 2007; they tracked none in 2001. RQ-4 Global Hawk UAVs collected imagery intelligence on 3,687 targets in 2001, and 96,349 six years later, he said. U-2 manned surveillance aircraft collected Imint on 26,749 preplanned targets of interest in 2001, compared to 52,000 in 2007. Finally, in 2001, RC-135 Rivet Joints flew 3,360 hours; six years later, the hours increased to 8,184.

19. Hon. Michael Donley, “A Time of Transition,” remarks to the Air Force Association’s 24th Annual Air and Space Conference and Technology Exposition, Washington, DC, 15 September 2008, *Air Force Link*, <http://www.af.mil/library/speeches/speech.asp?id=400>.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. See for example, Joseph Collins, “From the Ground Up,” *Armed Forces Journal* (October 2006), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/10/2088164>.

23. See for example, Charles J. Dunlap and John Nagl, “America’s Greatest Weapon,” *Small Wars Journal.com*, 22 May 2008, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2008/05/americas-greatest-weapon-1/>.

24. See for example, CAPT William J. Toti, USN, retired, “Write—with Your Eyes Wide Open,” *Proceedings* 134, no. 12 (December 2008): 16.

25. Max Hastings, *Warriors: Portraits from the Battlefield* (New York: Knopf, 2005), xvii.

26. See for example, John Andreas Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007).

27. Robert M. Gates, *Remarks to Air War College*, 21 April 2008, <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1231>.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Charles J. Dunlap Jr., “Counterpoint,” *The Wright Stuff*, 23 July 2008, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/aunews/archive/0313/Articles/Counterpoint.html>.

31. Schwartz and Stephan, “Don’t Go Downtown without Us.”

32. Rebecca Grant, “The Billy Mitchell Syndrome,” *Air Force Magazine* 89, no. 12 (December 2006), 52, <http://www.afa.org/magazine/dec2006/1206syndrome.asp>.