

Ambassador Robert Jordan our luncheon quest speaker

Here is a draft of an article he wrote for the Dallas Morning News in which he mentioned our meeting.

Jordan: America's warcraft are aging and often mismatched to the task

'Wartime footing' will require significant investments in the right kinds of weapons.

By [Robert Jordan](#), *Contributing Columnist* May 28, 2026

The Iran war has exposed significant weaknesses in America's military industrial base. Congress, the president and the Department of Defense must make smart investments to deal with a changing world.

Recently I addressed a local chapter of an association of Air Force veterans and supporters. Several in the audience expressed concerns about our aging military aircraft and our depleting munitions stocks.

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For example, the first B-52 was flown on April 15, 1952. The youngest was built in 1962. Seventy-six are still in service, flying extensive sorties in the Iran war.

During my time as ambassador to Saudi Arabia, I worked closely with then-Lt. Gen. Michael "Buzz" Mosely who headed the air campaign in the 2003 Iraq war. He had spent years flying the F-15 fighter and remarked that his son, also an Air Force pilot, was flying the exact air frame he had flown decades earlier.

Two years ago, retired Air Force Lt. Gen. David Deptula noted in Forbes that "the bulk of our Air Force consists of geriatric fighter, bomber, and trainer aircraft that were designed and built before the internet was invented."

We also are facing a pilot shortage. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates expressed concern in 2024 that "our Air Force has stagnated in size." This month, columnist George Will observed in *The Washington Post* that pilot retention is in crisis, with manpower falling more than 2,000 short. He pointed out that since 1991, "the number of fighter squadrons has declined from 134 to 56, the number of flight hours per month has declined from 22.3 to 10, and the average age of fighter planes has increased from 9.7 years to 30.3 years."

There are also concerns about the critical stresses on our munition's inventories caused by the war in Iran, several Air Force veterans have told me recently. As Tom Tugendhat, a member of the British Parliament, wrote this month in *The Wall Street Journal*, "Since February, the U.S. has fired more than 1,300 Patriot interceptors against Iranian missiles and drones. Each interceptor costs around \$4 million to destroy weapons that cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000 to replace. Based on the most recent rate of production, it will take two years for Lockheed Martin to replace what has been fired in the last 2 ½ months."

Part of the problem is our dependence upon sophisticated systems that rely on supply chains with uncertain availability, especially considering the Iran war. "We are running short of the raw materials for our exquisite weapons while our adversaries flood the battlefield with cheap drones," Tugendhat wrote.

We can learn a lesson from embattled Ukraine where an alternative has emerged.

"Ukraine is going to produce seven million drones this year," Gates said in an interview with Julian E. Barnes of *The New York Times* recently. "Come on. Why can't we do that?"

Barnes' reporting reminds us that nearly 20 years ago Gates famously castigated a military culture of developing weapons that offered a "99 percent solution" but took years to build. He urged development of "a new generation of arms that were '75 percent solutions' but could be produced more cheaply in months." The monarchies of the Persian Gulf got the message. They recently have partnered with Ukraine to produce drone interceptors at scale, taking advantage of Ukrainian experience on the battlefield.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has approached defense spending from the other end of the telescope, asking Congress for a \$1.5 trillion budget. But even within the largest military budget request in modern history, Hegseth is proposing a fundamental change in weapons procurement spending, advocating for "an 85 percent solution." Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell emphasized, "As we increase production of exquisite systems, we are actively looking for innovative low-cost solutions that can complement our high-end munitions."

Despite giving a nod to "innovative low-cost solutions," Hegseth is aiming to put our military industrial base on a "wartime footing." In a speech in November at the National Defense University, Hegseth asserted, "We're not just buying something. We are solving life and death problems for our war fighters. We're not building for peacetime. We are pivoting the Pentagon and our industrial base to a wartime footing."

This pivot does not mean reverting to the wartime economy we experienced during World War II. During the years following the first World War, the American military had fallen behind many of the world's military powers. But from 1940 to 1945 we witnessed a massive

buildup of manufacturing capacity. Those of a certain age will recall Rosie the Riveter, signifying the integration of women into the burgeoning manufacturing workforce.

While we hardly expect to reach the scale of those years, there will be consequences for the deterioration of our Air Force (and likely other service components) and our outdated culture of procurement, as well as the significant drawdown in our munition's stockpiles.

The United States spent 3.4% of its gross domestic product on defense in 2024, a fairly low number compared to historical patterns. If we truly are going on a wartime footing, we can expect pressure to spend more. For a nation already \$39 trillion in debt, that could lead to significant fiscal challenges. Congress still has the power of the purse but has not recently shown an inclination to act like an independent branch of government.

Speaking of Congress, lawmakers should also inquire whether these significant reductions in our munition's assets were contemplated before launching the Iran war, and what plans were made to replenish them in order to maintain readiness for the other multiple threats worldwide.

One can always hope.