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THE V-22 CONTROVERSY

INTRODUCTION

In the early to late 1980's, the V-22 Osprey was on-track to full production, until the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) unexpectedly canceled the program in 1989. Cancellation of the V-22 program caused a firestorm of opposition in Congress -- in the end all sides appear to have won. OSD cancellation of the V-22 program and subsequent Congressional reaction set the stage for a unique political battle amongst varied interests.

The "bureaucratic politics" employed by the various actors in the cancellation and resurrection of the V-22 will be examined under the lights of Congressional, OSD, Bell-Boeing and Marine Corps interests. The essence of "bureaucratic politics" as applied to this case can be characterized as the malevolently emotional and tangential political route the V-22 program has travelled.

V-22 BACKGROUND

The V-22 is the product of tiltrotor technology first flight tested in 1958 by Bell helicopters. As a result of multi-service interest in tiltrotor technology, OSD created a joint service program in December of 1981 labeled the Joint Services Advanced Vertical Lift Aircraft Development (JVX) program. Initially, the U. S. Army was designated as the executive agent for the JVX program.¹ The other three services were active participants in

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the program and enthusiastic about the potential of tiltrotor technology to fulfill a variety of individual service aviation missions. The Marine Corps' keen interest in this program stemmed from a critical need to replace its aging CH-46 transport helicopter fleet.

In 1983, OSD accepted a concept proposed by a corporate team of Bell Helicopter-Textron and Boeing-Vertol (Bell-Boeing), and out of this concept the V-22 emerged.² The Bell-Boeing V-22 is a twin engine tiltrotor airplane that operates in three flight regimes - helicopter, transitional and airplane flight.³ In 1984, Army and Air Force interest in the program waned for various programmatic reasons, and the Navy was named as executive agent for the program. By 1986, the Marine Corps was the most active and forceful proponent of the V-22.⁴ The Marines counted on the V-22 to begin entering service in the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) in the early 1990s.

OSD CANCELS THE V-22

Throughout its developmental stages, the V-22 program was solidly supported by both OSD and Congress. In January 1989, OSD funded the program in the fiscal year 90 (FY-90) President's Budget. In April 1989, the newly appointed Secretary of Defense (Sec Def), the Honorable Mr. Cheney canceled the V-22 program in an amended FY-90 President's Budget, and almost immediately aroused a Congress to counter OSD.⁵ In the words of Senator Inouye (D-HI), "It is an understatement to say that the Secretary's decision to terminate the V-22 has been

controversial."⁶ The other major V-22 supporters in this soon to be emotional political battle were predictably the Bell-Boeing lobby and the Marine Corps. OSD cancellation of the program energized the major players, and battle lines were drawn -- OSD vs. Congress, Bell-Boeing and the Marine Corps.

POSITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS

OSD

In April of 1989, the Secretary of Defense the Honorable Mr. Cheney was faced with the unwelcome and unpleasant task of cutting the DOD budget. In submitting the amended FY-90 President's Budget, Mr. Cheney in concert with Dr. Chu (Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Analysis and Evaluation), canceled the V-22 along with other "key" defense programs not yet in production. Basically, these programs were canceled because of their high up-front investment costs, and cutting these costs achieved substantial savings.⁷ In other words, OSD viewed the V-22 as unaffordable in an era of considerable budget decrements.

On the surface it appears that Mr. Cheney and Dr. Chu used a reasonable and rational approach to cut the V-22 program to achieve the most savings, and it seems they made choices without considering the political implications. But in politics, "... everyone is always arguing philosophically and rationally when there is a political motive."⁸ OSD's political motives will be explored later.

Bell-Boeing

Bell-Boeing is a subsidiary of the Boeing company, and the

prime contractor for the V-22. The company employs dozens of V-22 sub-contractors located in 47 states. The V-22 tiltrotor concept is leading edge technology, and Bell-Boeing estimates they have a five year technological lead over their chief competitors in Japan and Europe.⁹ Bell-Boeing is eager to maintain their tiltrotor technological lead over their competitors, and they are anxious to see the V-22 continue development and enter full production.

OSD cancellation of the program caught Bell-Boeing by surprise. This unexpected cut was seen as an uncharacteristic move considering the overall potential benefits of tiltrotor technology, widespread Congressional backing and steadfast support of the Marine Corps.¹⁰

Marine Corps

To more fully understand the Marine Corps' perspective and steadfast support of the V-22, a brief sketch of the Corps' personality is helpful. To illustrate the personality of the Marine Corps, Mr. Carl Builder's "altars of worship" methodology, used in The Masks of War will be applied to outline the basic character of the Marine Corps.¹¹

The Marine Corps can be said to worship at the altar of the clan, and by extension the Corps possesses a dogged determination to preserve and perpetuate the clan. Lt Gen Victor H. Krulak, USMC (Ret.), represents the persona of this clan-like service as:

"Beneficial or not, the continuous struggle for a viable existence fixed clearly one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Corps - a sensitive paranoia, sometimes justified, sometimes not. It is in this

atmosphere of institutional vigilance that the Marines have been nourished over the years. This instinctive personal concern of the Marines as individuals for the survival of their Corps has certainly been one of the principal factors in its preservation."¹²

At the close of World War II in 1945, the Marines came dangerously close to being legislated out of existence through the determined efforts of the Executive Branch, and the other three services. Much to the annoyance of President Truman, the Marines turned to Congress who "saved the day" and passed legislation to guarantee survival of the clan. To this day the Marines still enjoy a close relationship with Congress, and have not hesitated to go to them for support -- the V-22 is no exception.

Out of the post-World War II defense reorganization battles, the Marine Corps still harbors a deeply ingrained, institutional distrust of the motives of OSD and the other services in any matter concerning the clan. To illuminate the emergence of this distrust Lt Gen Krulak wrote:

"In conversation with Commandant Vandergrift at the height of the (defense reorganization 1945-47) controversy, the President (Truman) eyed him quizzically and said, "You Marines don't trust anybody do you?" The president was right."¹³

OSD cancellation of the V-22 stunned the Marines, and activated their latent mistrust of those who would deny the clan.

Congress

Prior to the announcement by OSD of its intention to cut the V-22, the program had broad bi-partisan support within the Congress, but Congressional support was considered to be latent

and not very well organized.¹⁴ There are several reasons why Congress embraced the program: production of the V-22 fills a critical need for the Marine Corps by replacing its aging fleet of CH-46 helicopters; it has vast potential for multiple uses in civil aviation; the tiltrotor concept has the potential to revolutionize commercial air travel; it is homegrown leading edge technology, and representative of the type of technology that maintains U. S. world leadership in the aerospace industry; it has a large potential to create structural employment in an era of rapidly dissipating structural employment; there are potentially large domestic and international markets to generate substantial revenues for U. S. aviation industries well into the 21st century.¹⁵

In summary, the Congress perceived the V-22 as a model example of a dual-use technology that produced tangible benefits for national security, civil aviation, domestic employment and the U. S. economy. The overwhelming reaction of Congress to OSD cancellation of the V-22 program was shock.¹⁶

ANALYSIS OF THE BUREAUCRATIC BATTLE

In reviewing the institutional positions of the major players leading up to the cancellation of the V-22, one could logically conclude that all the players sincerely believed they were acting rationally, and in the best interest of the nation and their organizations. This objective assessment fits compactly into Graham T. Allison's "Model I: The Rational Actor."¹⁷ But, examining the "bureaucratic politics" and tactics

employed by OSD, in the aftermath of the V-22's cancellation, gives cause to suspect OSD's role as a rational and fair player.

Announcement of the V-22's cancellation ignited a Congressional firestorm and caused the Congress to exert a more concerted effort to resurrect the program. In reaction to OSD's cancellation, Congress reinserted research and development (R&D) funding for the V-22 in the FY-90 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) enacted in October 1989.¹⁸ However, Congress did reach an agreement with OSD, included as a provision in the FY-90 NDAA, that no decision on V-22 production would be made, until an independent cost and operational effectiveness analysis (COEA) was completed and reviewed.

Oddly, Sec Def Cheney interpreted the provisions of the FY-90 NDAA to mean that the V-22 would terminate with R&D and would not proceed into production. OSD's interpretation of the FY-90 NDAA, V-22 provisions defies rational explanation. Why would Congress fund a defense program with millions of taxpayer dollars if they had already agreed it would not go into production? As is often the case in bureaucratic maneuvering - there is no simple answer, only political motives.

An even more bizarre move was made by Sec Def Cheney in November 1989. Mr. Cheney took the unusual and defiant step of impounding the V-22 R&D funds included in the FY-90 NDAA. OSD's direct defiance of Congress and glaring misinterpretation of the FY-90 NDAA caused an uproar within the Congress. In this light, Allison's "Rational Actor" model cannot adequately explain OSD's

actions of impounding Congressionally appropriated funds, or explain OSD's misinterpretation of the FY-90 NDAA as rational choices. To better understand the V-22 controversy, one must use Allison's "Model III: Governmental Politics" in which governmental action is a result of politics.¹⁹

Out of the initial shock of Sec Def Cheney's decision to cancel the V-22 and impound V-22 funding emerged a cohesive "tiltrotor triad" represented by an increasingly unified Congress; a large and robust "tiltrotor coalition" formed by Bell-Boeing; and an alarmed but resolute Marine Corps. Congress quickly united, and assembled a broader and more united bi-partisan support base. The Congressional effort to gather support for the V-22 was spearheaded by Congressman Curt Weldon (R-Pa). He amassed a formidable bi-partisan group that included a wide range of ideological opposites like Congressmen Ron Dellums (D-Ca) and Bob Dornan (R-Ca), and Congressmen John Murtha (D-Pa) and Barney Franks (D-Mass).²⁰

Bell-Boeing intensified their Congressional lobbying efforts, and sent out the "call to arms" across the nation to numerous leaders of industry and other prominent citizens who all had one thing in common - they had served on active duty in the Marine Corps and "Once a Marine, always a Marine." The Marine clan took up the V-22 banner and attacked. This nationwide "tiltrotor coalition" resolutely and repeatedly let Congress know that the V-22 was good for the nation.

In the Marines' camp, their Commandant, Gen Gray was the

driving force. Within Congress Gen Gray had tremendous credibility. Although Gen Gray publicly supported the President's Budget, when asked his opinion during several Congressional hearings, he forcefully made the Marines case that the V-22 was the only acceptable replacement for the aging CH-46. He was not politically delicate - he told it like it is. Gen Gray's successor, Gen Carl Mundy has also proven to be an ardent supporter of the V-22.²¹ The Marines steadfast support of the program has been a key element of V-22 survivability, for without it the program might be viewed as a "pork" issue, and probably succumb.

THE BATTLE RAGES BETWEEN CONGRESS AND OSD

Standing nose to nose with a formidable and politically united "tiltrotor triad", OSD refused to budge from their position, and continued to bureaucratically slug it out with their primary opponent, the Congress. Throughout FY-90, OSD inexplicably refused to release V-22 R&D funding. Once again in April of 1990, OSD did not fund for the V-22 in its FY-91 submission of the President's Budget to Congress, and again Congress funded V-22 R&D in the FY-91 NDAA, and included funding for advanced procurement. This was countered by OSD again impounding V-22 funds. At this point the V-22 became a "manhood issue", which decisively engaged an indignant Congress with an insolent OSD.²² Again in FY-92, OSD refused to obligate V-22 funds appropriated by Congress. To illustrate this volley of political maneuvers, a partial V-22 budget track from January

1989 through July 1991 is provided at Tab A. Ultimately, in the Summer of 1992, OSD relented and obligated V-22 funding in accordance with Congressional legislation. But, only after the Government Accounting Office (GAO) advised in the Spring of 1992 that OSD did not have the authority to impound funds appropriated by Congress.

RATIONAL REASONS OR POLITICAL MOTIVES

Within the political field of play and throughout this lengthy struggle, Congress acted rationally and within its purview. OSD was perceived on Capitol Hill as an irrational player who did not play by the rules. Why did Mr. Cheney repeatedly choose to defy a Congress exercising its constitutional authority and what were his motives? A crystal clear answer may never be uncovered. But, based on the events and bureaucratic maneuverings outlined above, merged with plausible OSD political motives, a likely theory emerges.

There is a belief on Capitol Hill that Mr. Cheney had no political agenda, and in cutting the V-22 he was only looking to achieve savings by cutting systems that had not entered production.²³ Mr. Cheney was not viewed as a defense expert, and some believed he relied heavily on the recommendations of Dr. Chu in canceling the V-22 program.²⁴ It was not perceived that Mr. Cheney or Dr. Chu went beyond the numbers to look at the V-22's potential benefits (e.g., commercial applications), or fully appreciated the depth of Congressional support.²⁵ The above view logically tracks up until Mr. Cheney impounded V-22 funding.

This step requires us to pause and explore an alternative political motive for canceling the program. The following is a notional scenario and is not represented as fact, merely one explanation of Mr. Cheney's motives.

Although Mr. Cheney may not have been a defense expert, he certainly was a veteran politician. Prior to becoming Sec Def, Mr. Cheney served on Capitol Hill as Congressman Cheney (R-Wyo). He knew the inner workings of Congress and how they conducted business, and was well aware of the strong V-22 support within the Congress. In canceling the V-22 program, savings was not the primary issue but an excuse. Mr. Cheney's strategy was to cancel or reduce programs to create issues that Congress would rally around (e.g., V-22 and A-12 cancellation and reduced C-17 and B-2 funding). At the time, Mr. Cheney may not have been sure which program(s) would become an issue - he wanted to generate a controversy.²⁶

Cancellation of the V-22 was the bait taken aggressively by Congress, and allowed Mr. Cheney to divert attention away from other strategic defense programs he wanted funded. In FY-90, Congress funded approximately 95 percent of what Mr. Cheney asked, and is roughly the normal funding percentage for most defense budgets submitted by OSD.²⁷ But, the V-22 "trojan horse" allowed him to get his key programs within the "castle walls" of Congress and funded as requested. Simultaneously, Mr. Cheney reaped the side benefit of poking a political adversary in the eye - former Congressman Jim Wright (D-TX) in whose District the

V-22 was to be built. To illustrate Mr. Cheney's and Mr. Wright's adversarial relationship, Mr. Cheney has been reported to regard Mr. Wright as a, "... heavy handed sonofabitch."²³

Finally, by impounding the V-22 funds and lending only faint hearted support to development of a suitable alternative for two years, Mr. Cheney was able to stall major V-22 progress, which kept the controversy alive and a supportive Congress focused on a program of his choice. There is an interesting paradox imbedded in this theory and that is, Mr. Cheney's sustained opposition, solidly planted across the path of an increasingly determined Congress, guaranteed the survival of the V-22.

EPILOGUE

In summarizing the outcome of this controversy, it appears that all sides achieved a victory. In the final analysis, Mr. Cheney achieved his objectives presented above, and the "tiltrotor triad" has a fully funded V-22 program in the FY-93 NDAA, with guarantees of no further interference by OSD.

The direct and indirect supporting roles played by Bell-Boeing and the Marine Corps cannot be overemphasized. Without their unwavering support Congress may have hesitated and lost the fight. Noting their positions and actions is key in grasping the essence of this controversy. However, the resurrection of the V-22 was primarily due to the sustained and determined legislative efforts of Congress. This is a case where Congress can truly be proud of itself. This was Congress at its best, because they took the time and made the effort to gain and

maintain support for a defense program with many benefits for the nation.²⁹

Finally, as with many controversial political issues the V-22 battle may not be over. In politics, political decisions are rarely definitively final. The players or players positions may change, which provides new opportunities to reopen the issue.³⁰

The incoming Clinton administration has pledged to support the V-22 program, but political pledges and political resultants are often miles apart. Recently, a key supporter of the V-22 program, the Chairman of House Appropriations defense subcommittee Congressman John P. Murtha (D-Pa), has predicted that the Clinton administration will have to cancel the V-22, and further predicted that any defense decision will be tied to how it effects the deficit.³¹ Are these predictions evidence of new V-22 storm clouds gathering on the horizon or more political maneuvering? The political odds are in favor of the V-22 controversy continuing.

ENDNOTES

1. Johnson, Stephen, T., Lt Col, USMC. "The V-22 Osprey: Phoenix or Albatross?" Individual Project Study (IPS) (9 April 1992): 16.
2. Ibid: 17.
3. Ibid: 16.
4. Ibid: 18.
5. HQMC, Action Officer budget track.
6. Statement of Senator Inouye (D-HI) before the Subcommittee on Defense on Appropriations of the U. S. Senate Hearing on the "Institute for Defense Analysis Study of the V-22 Osprey." (IDA Study) (19 July 1990): 1.
7. Statement of Dr. Chu before the Subcommittee on Defense on Appropriations of the U. S. Senate Hearing on the "Institute for Defense Analysis Study of the V-22 Osprey." (IDA Study) (19 July 1990): 42.
8. Dr. Lawrence Korb, Director, Center for Public Policy Education, the Brookings Institute. National War College Lecture, 7 December 1992.
9. Mr. Robert K. Lange, Congressional Affairs Manager, The Boeing Company, interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington, D. C.
10. Lange interview.
11. Carl H. Builder, The Masks of War, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1989): 17.
12. Lt Gen Victor H. Krulak, First to Fight, (New York, N. Y.: Pocket Books): 18.
13. Ibid. Parenthetical remarks added: 59.
14. Ms Nancy A. Lifset, Congressional Staff Member for Congressman Curt Weldon (R-PA). Interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington, D. C.
15. House of Representatives. Letter to President Bush. 22 September 1992, Washington, D. C.
16. Lifset interview.

17. Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision (Harvard University: Harper Collins Publishers): 14-38.
18. HQMC, Action Officer budget track.
19. Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision (Harvard University: Harper Collins Publishers): 171, 236.
20. Peter J. Rose, Congressional Staff Member for Congressman Pete Geren (D-Tx). Interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington d. C.
21. Greene, Lifset, Ringo and Rose interviews.
22. Creighton Greene, Professional Staff Member, Senate Armed Services Committee. Interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington, D. C.
23. Lifset interview.
24. Rose interview.
25. Lifset interview.
26. Durwood W. Ringo, Professional Staff Member, Senate Armed Services Committee. Interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington, D. C.
27. Dr. Charles Stevenson, Professor of Military Strategy and Operations, National War College. Interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington, D. C.
28. Rose interview.
29. Ibid.
30. Dr. Roy W. Stafford, Professor of National Security Strategy, National War College. Interview by author, 4 December 1992, Washington, D. C.
31. Aviation Week and Space Technology (7 December 1992): 21

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Subcommittee on Defense on Appropriations of the U. S. Senate
Hearing on the "Institute for Defense Analysis Study of the V-22
Osprey." (IDA Study) (19 July 1990): 1.

♦ Jun 1991 - FY89 advance procurement funds obligated.

♦ Jul 1991 - SASC mark on FY92 President's Budget continues authorization of previously appropriated FY91 and FY89 advance procurement funds (\$365M) and deletes FY92 and FY93 research and development funds for MLR.

FACTS:

- ♦ Jan 1989 - DON and OSD fund MV-22 in FY90 President's Budget.
- ♦ Apr 1989 - OSD terminated the MV-22 program and funded CH-53/H-60 alternative in FY90 Amended President's Budget.
- ♦ Oct 1989 - Congress deleted CH-53/H-60 alternative and funds research/development and advance procurement for the MV-22 in FY90 National Defense Authorization Act.
- ♦ Nov 1989 - OSD withholds MV-22 funds authorized by Congress and directs DON to develop alternative option to MV-22.
- ♦ Apr 1990 - DON funds Medium Lift Replacement (MLR) and CH-46E "Gap-filler" in POM 92.
- ♦ Oct 1990 - Congress deletes MLR and funds research/development and advance procurement of MV-22 in FY91 National Defense Authorization Act.
- ♦ Nov 1991 - OSD withholds FY91 funds and does not fund MV-22 in FY92 President's Budget.
- ♦ Dec 1991 - OSD deletes CH-46E "Gap-filler" in FY92 DON Budget.
- ♦ Feb 1991 - OSD requests FY91 MV-22 advance procurement (\$165M) reprogrammed to FY91/FY92 RDT&E and rescission of FY89 advance procurement (\$200M) in FY92 President's Budget. MLR research/development and procurement is funded.
- ♦ Apr 1991 - Congress directs OSD to release and obligate FY89 MV-22 advance procurement funds within 60 days in the Dire Emergency Supplemental.
- ♦ May 1991 - OSD releases FY89 MV-22 advance procurement funds.
- ♦ May 1991 - HASC mark on the FY92 President's Budget merges FY91/FY89 advance procurement to RDT&E, procures three production representative aircraft in FY92 and FY93, and deletes FY92 research and development funds for MLR.
- ♦ Jun 1991 - HAC mark on FY92 President's Budget funds procurement of three MV-22 production representative aircraft and deletes FY92 research and development funds for MLR.