

THE USAF AT 75

RENEWING OUR DEMOCRATIC ETHOS

MARYBETH P. ULRICH

Countering threats to American democracy is a vital national interest. Civics literacy and the development of a democratic ethos must be fostered in Americans beginning in early childhood, but the military plays a role in national democratic renewal as well. On the occasion of its 75th birthday, the US Air Force must draw upon its heritage, renewing a commitment to a democratic ethos that preferences service members' obligation to the Oath of Office above partisan or personal interests.

This year, 2022, marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of a separate US Air Force. In 1947, six months before the birth of the United States Air Force, President Harry S. Truman committed the United States to a policy "to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."¹ The Truman Doctrine equated the spread of authoritarianism with a threat to the security of the United States. The United States Air Force became the newest tool among US instruments of power to secure the continued viability of American democracy and the revitalization of its democratic allies in the aftermath of World War II.

In 1947, Americans largely trusted their government and respected and understood its democratic institutions.² Indeed, the narrative sustained on the home front and in the theaters of war was that American servicemen fought to rid the world of the tyrannical Axis powers and secure the democracies these powers had threatened. But much of the civic consciousness that underpinned the Army Air Forces' and its successor US Air Force's achievements in the Cold War has changed, with potentially catastrophic effects.

The service now focuses largely on great power competition and its technological edge; both are strategic ends that rightly demand the attention of the nation's political and military leadership. The threats stemming from great power competition and from losing our technology-based advantages are accompanied, however, by another,

1. "The Truman Doctrine, 1947," US Department of State, Office of the Historian (website), <https://history.state.gov/>.

2. "History of Civics Education in the United States," Research 4SC, n. d., accessed January 14, 2022, <https://research4sc.org/>.

more insidious threat gathering from within the American domestic political system. This new menace is rooted in a decline in civic understanding in society at large, complacent citizenship, and insufficient development of a professional military ethos steeped in democratic civil-military relations.

Countering threats to American democracy from abroad and from within must be elevated to the most vital of national interests. A grassroots and national effort could enable civics literacy and the development of a democratic ethos in the citizenry from the earliest age. The military also has a role in national democratic renewal. The US Air Force in particular, on the occasion of its diamond anniversary, must draw upon its heritage and also renew its commitment to a democratic ethos that places service members' obligation to the Oath of Office above partisan or personal interests.

In short, the service must adopt a multi-dimensional approach to its professional ethos to include both a democratic ethos and a warrior ethos. The current nearly exclusive emphasis on warrior ethos focuses on "how we fight," not "why we fight." A comprehensive program of professional development across all levels of professional military education (PME) is needed to develop Air Force professionals steeped in an understanding of American democracy and democratic civil-military relations norms that complement their warrior ethos. Such Airmen will be well versed in the constitutional obligations that anchor their military service. They will enjoy the increased confidence of the citizenry and internalize a love of country that will underpin their will to fight to preserve its ideals. A look back at the Army Air Forces' democratic ethos offers some lessons for today's Airmen.

Why the Army Air Forces Fought

On January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt argued in his annual State of the Union address to Congress that America was contributing its "arsenal of democracy" to the war to preserve the "four freedoms": the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear.³ These principles symbolized America's rationale for supporting the war and were the precursors to the 1942 Atlantic Charter's war aims that laid out the parameters of a postwar global order.

Promoting a democratic ethos was also a priority of the armed forces. In 1942, General George C. Marshall, Army chief of staff and architect of the war effort at home, recruited Hollywood director and Signal Corps major Frank Capra to produce a series of orientation films for service members undergoing their initial training with the purpose of "maintaining morale and instilling loyalty and discipline."

The result was the seven-film *Why We Fight* series that explained to service members and civilians that the purpose of the massive effort to defeat the Axis powers was to defend American values. The films focused on aspects of American life that were worth fighting for. For example, the first film, *Prelude to War*, drew attention to

3. "FDR and the Four Freedoms Speech," National Archives: Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Museum and Library (website), <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/>.

President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address that declared "government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."⁴ The message was clear. American GIs were charged with continuing the cause of American democracy.

The generation that served in the Army Air Forces and who were the first to fill the ranks of the new Air Force came of age at a time when civics played a central role in public education. Consequently, they were well grounded in the fundamentals of American democracy. The Air Force was able to draw on this democratic ethos in the development of its professional ethos.

A key tool in this respect was S. L. A. Marshall's *The Armed Forces Officer*, a Department of Defense pamphlet first published in 1950 at the request of Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall. Secretary Marshall held the "personal conviction that American military officers, of whatever service, should share common ground ethically and morally."⁵

This comprehensive guide to officership started with an explanation of the officer's oath and commission. The first sentence described the officer's commission as "a lasting obligation" that is not "lessened on the day an officer puts the uniform aside and returns to civil life."⁶ The guide continued, "an officer is expected so to maintain himself, and so to exert his influence for so long as he may live, that he will be recognized as a worthy symbol of all that is best in the national character."⁷ There is no breakdown of constitutional processes that the service member has sworn to "protect and defend," but the guide alluded to the officer's assumed knowledge of these processes.

A main point is that on becoming an officer a man does not renounce any part of his fundamental character as an American citizen. He has simply signed on for the post graduate course where one learns how to exercise authority in accordance with the spirit of liberty. The nature of his trusteeship has been subtly expressed by an Admiral in our service: "The American philosophy places the individual above the state. It distrusts personal power and coercion. It denies the existence of indispensable men. It asserts the supremacy of principle."⁸

Richard Swain and Albert Pierce updated *The Armed Forces Officer* in 2007 and 2017. The 2017 guide still opens with a discussion of the commission and oath, explaining that the execution of the constitutional oath activates the commission.⁹ Swain and Pierce acknowledge the oath's charge "to well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office" but note the nature of those duties is undefined "beyond the shared purpose of protecting and defending the Constitution."¹⁰

4. Ashley S. Behringer, "Why We Fight: Prelude to War, America's Crash History Lesson," *The Unwritten Record* (blog), The National Archives, September 1, 2020, <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/>.

5. Richard M. Swain and Albert C. Pierce, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2017), preface, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/>.

6. S. L. A. Marshall, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1950), 6, <https://www.usna.edu/>.

7. Marshall, *Armed Forces Officer*, 6.

8. Marshall, *Armed Forces Officer*, 9.

9. Swain and Pierce, *Armed Forces Officer*, 5.

10. Swain and Pierce, *Armed Forces Officer*, 5.

They conclude this foundational part of the guide by laying out some expectations in the civil-military relationship with regard to honorable service. “The guarantee of that service is internalization in every officer of the expectations embodied in the commission and the oath: patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities; dedication to the protection of the letter of and the values embodied in the Constitution; and a willingness to offer, if required, what President Lincoln called ‘the last full measure of devotion’ in its defense.”¹¹

Among other influential tools that the Department of Defense has to shape the professional ethos of its service members are *Developing Today’s Joint Officers for Tomorrow’s Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* and *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction: Officer Professional Military Education Policy*, both published in May 2020. These documents give broad PME guidance to the military services.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff vision document highlights the importance of “intellectual overmatch” and continually exercising “new intellectual skills” to sustain America’s competitive advantage.¹² The emphasis is on the accelerating pace of new technologies and the global integration of national power. There is no mention, however, of educating service members to address domestic threats of any kind, nor is there any indication that PME should play a role in ensuring service members have a deep understanding of their oaths and commissions. The document does emphasize the use of case studies, games, and exercises—educational methodologies that could be leveraged to include a civics-consciousness component in PME.¹³

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction goes into more detail in support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff vision. Figure A-1, Officer Professional Military Education Continuum, includes the focus of military education at each of the five levels of PME, from precommissioning to the general/flag officer capstone course. Currently, the US Constitution and US government are only highlighted at the precommissioning level of PME.¹⁴

In addition, one of the six Joint learning areas is the profession of arms, and the Instruction notes, “joint officers are first and foremost members of the profession of arms, sworn to support and defend the Constitution, with specialized knowledge in the art and science of war.”¹⁵ But the document does not further elaborate on the substance of the expert knowledge applicable to carrying out officers’ constitutional oaths or the deep understanding of the civic notions that tie military professionalism to the support of democratic processes.

11. Swain and Pierce, *Armed Forces Officer*, 10.

12. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), *Developing Today’s Joint Officers for Tomorrow’s Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* (Washington, DC: CJCS May 1, 2020), <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

13. CJCS, *Talent Management*.

14. CJCS, *Officer Professional Military Education Policy*, CJCS Instruction (CJCSI) 1800.01F (Washington, DC: CJCS, May 15, 2020), A-15, <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

15. CJCS, CJCSI-1800.01F, A-A-1.

The 1950 and 2017 editions of *The Armed Forces Officer* span 67 of the Air Force's 75 years. Both assume well-formed citizens have elected to take up arms in the service of their country, but studies show the American educational system is not producing such citizens. A 2020 national survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found a quarter of Americans cannot name a single branch of government, and only 51 percent could name all three branches.¹⁶

In terms of knowledge of the military's role in democracy, a 2014 YouGov survey found American civilians surveyed favored the elected political leadership deferring to military experts on national security policy, a position in conflict with democratic norms of civil-military relations.¹⁷ The centrality of civics in American education has eroded over time to the point where it garners less than 10 percent of classroom time and 5 cents per student per year compared to \$54 per student annually spent on science, technology, engineering, and math education.¹⁸ As a result, young people entering the armed forces generally lack the understanding of citizenship and civic consciousness necessary to fulfill their oaths of enlistment and commissioning.

The Department of Defense's cultivation of a democratic ethos within its professional ethos has simply not kept pace with the national decline in civics education, the erosion of democratic norms, and the concurrent decline in democratic norms of civil-military relations.¹⁹ Richard Kohn, former Air Force historian and professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina, alerted US Air Force Academy cadets to this trend of declining norms more than 20 years ago.

In his 1999 Harmon Lecture, Kohn noted cracks in the foundation needed to support the military's democratic professional ethos. These essential pillars of democracy include respect for the rule of law; reverence for the Constitution; intolerance for "any violation of the Constitution or its process," which neither any branch of government nor the public would support; and the armed forces' internalization of their subordination to civil authority as the foundation of military professionalism.²⁰

16. Annenberg Civics Knowledge Survey, "Amid Pandemic and Protests, Civics Survey Finds Americans Know More of Their Rights," Annenberg Public Policy Center, September 14, 2020, <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/>.

17. Kori Schake and James Mattis, *Warriors and Civilians: American Views of Our Military* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2016), 299.

18. Rebecca Burgess, "Civic Education, the Essential Substrata of Military and National Service," American Enterprise Institute, July 5, 2019, <https://www.aei.org/>; and Suzanne Spaulding, "Civics as a National Security Imperative: A Conversation with Senior Military Officers," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 14, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/>.

19. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2018); Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019); and Marybeth P. Ulrich, "Civil-Military Relations Norms and Democracy: What Every Citizen Should Know," in *Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations*, ed. Lionel Beehner, Risa Brooks, and Daniel Maurer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

20. Richard H. Kohn, "The Erosion of Civilian Control of the Military in the United States Today," *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, 1988–2017* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2020), <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>.

Cracks in the Professional Ethos

On January 6, 2021, it was clear the cracks in the pillars of American democracy and its supporting professional military ethos had grown wider when a mob attacked the US Capitol, disrupting the congressional process of certifying the 2020 presidential election results. Many media reports in the first weeks after the insurrection headlined the military history of those involved in the attacks, often pointing out that these veterans, themselves, “had once sworn to protect the Constitution.”²¹

A December 2021 CBS News analysis determined at least 81 of the approximately 700 individuals charged for their participation in the insurrection had military ties. Most were veterans; however, one of those who breached the Capitol was an active duty Marine Corps major, four were active members of either the Army Reserve or National Guard, and one enlisted in the Army after the insurrection and was arrested at Fort Bragg in October 2021. CBS News reported that at least 36 had served in the Marine Corps, 28 in the Army, 3 in the Navy, and 5 in the Air Force.²²

One of the rioters charged with violent entry on Capitol grounds who was covered widely in media reports was Air Force veteran and 1989 Air Force Academy graduate Larry Brock Jr. Brock was photographed wearing combat gear and holding flex cuffs inside the Senate chamber. In the weeks between the election and the January 6th insurrection, Brock posted on Facebook referencing his belief that Joseph Biden was not the lawful president-elect. “I see no distinction between a group of Americans seizing power and governing with complete disregard to the Constitution and an invading force of Chinese communists accomplishing the same objective.”²³

Brock ended his post with a reference to his commissioning oath: “Against all enemies foreign and domestic.” Clearly, this Air Force veteran misunderstood the workings of American democracy regarding electoral integrity and that his obligation under his oath was to defend democratic processes—not subvert them.

Some judges have considered the military service of veterans involved in the January 6 insurrection to be an aggravating factor leading to harsher treatment in trial procedures and sentencing when convicted. When ruling against releasing retired Army Sergeant Jeffrey McKellop, an Iraq and Afghanistan War veteran, before trial, District Judge Carl Nichols noted McKellop’s military service suggests “he should have known better. I am more concerned about his conduct that day than I might have been if it was some random person.”²⁴

Magistrate Judge Michael Harvey similarly ruled that retired Army Ranger Specialist Robert Morss should remain in jail awaiting trial because he was “willing to use his

21. Tom Dreisbach and Meg Anderson, “Nearly 1 in 5 Defendants in Capitol Riot Cases Served in the Military,” National Public Radio, January 21, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/>.

22. Eleanor Watson and Robert Legare, “Over 80 of Those Charged in the January 6 Investigation Have Ties to the Military,” CBSNews, December 15, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/>.

23. Dreisbach and Anderson, “Capitol Riot Cases.”

24. Marshall Cohen and Hannah Rabinowitz, “These Veterans Swore to Defend the Constitution; Now They’re Facing Jail Time for the US Capitol Riot,” CNN, November 9, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

training or experience to organize with the rioters” to subvert democracy, “thereby making their actions more effective, more forceful and more violent.”²⁵

Some Air Force veteran-rioters have atoned for their roles on January 6. Air Force veteran Thomas Vinson commented at his sentencing hearing, “I signed up for the Air Force to take care of and defend this country,” he said. “I took that oath to the Constitution and I know I broke that oath that day by entering that building and participating in the events of January 6. It’s a blemish that’s going to be on myself, my family, for the rest of my life, and the country, and into the history books.”²⁶ Vinson was sentenced to five years of probation, a \$5,000 fine, \$500 in restitution, and 120 hours of community service.²⁷

Retired Air Force Master Sergeant Jonathan Sanders also told the judge he had “failed” his extensive military training. “That was a personal failure on my part. I wasn’t coerced, I wasn’t tricked, I wasn’t pushed. . . . That failure on my part is uncharacteristic. I know that my family, my friends, the men and women I served with and especially the men and women who trained me expected better.”²⁸ Sanders was sentenced to probation rather than the higher sentencing guideline of six months in jail.

An Antidote to Extremism

A serious and deliberate effort to facilitate service members’ understanding of the Constitution and their oaths to uphold it would also contribute to mitigating the problem of extremism in the military. In the months after the January 6 insurrection, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered a 60-day stand-down, a period of mandated discussion across units “to remind the country’s military personnel that the oath they took to support and defend the Constitution means that they cannot storm the Capitol to stop lawmakers from certifying election results they do not like.”²⁹

Military leaders have appealed to the oath as the linchpin of a professional ethos that does not tolerate extremists in the ranks. Austin noted that an overwhelming number of service members “respect the oath they took to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.” But those violating the oath through participation in extremist activities “can have an outsized impact on unit cohesion, morale and readiness, and the physical harm some of these activities can engender can undermine the safety of our people.”³⁰

25. Cohen and Rabinowitz, “Facing Jail Time.”

26. Cohen and Rabinowitz, “Facing Jail Time.”

27. Billy Kobin, “Kentucky Nurse, Air Force Veteran Sentenced for Their Roles in Jan. 6 Riot at US Capitol,” *Louisville Courier Journal*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.courier-journal.com/>.

28. Cohen and Rabinowitz, “Facing Jail Time.”

29. John Ismay and Helene Cooper, “After Capitol Riot, Pentagon Announces New Efforts to Weed Out Extremism among Troops,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

30. Helene Cooper, “Pentagon Updates Its Rules on Extremism in the Military,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

The Department of Defense policy released in December 2020 bans active participation in extremist groups and lists specific prohibited behaviors. These include “liking” or reposting extremist views on social media.³¹ In an effort to balance service members’ first amendment rights, membership in extremist organizations is not banned. This aspect of the policy has been controversial and is an example of when service members’ rights as citizens conflict with professional norms. In such situations, a robust democratic ethos must be relied upon to constrain service members’ behavior.

Air Force Chief of Staff General CQ Brown is one senior military leader who has appealed to the service’s professional ethos, and the oath specifically, to root out extremism. Brown remarked in an interview on the *PBS NewsHour* that “membership of an extremist organization—that goes against our core values, that goes against your oath and is not what we need in our military.” He added, “Those that don’t live up to our core values of integrity, service, and excellence, those that don’t stand up and hold themselves to the oath of office they take to the Constitution, those are the ones that we don’t need in our military.”³²

Fostering a Democratic Ethos

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley and Brown have voiced their personal commitments to the oath and the American ideals it represents. What remains to be done is the hard work of integrating the civics education necessary to renew the US military’s democratic ethos. What should be included in a program of professional military education that aims to provide this understanding? Several military leaders have weighed in on this question, and the Air Force Academy’s Oath Project is leading the way in implementing many of their ideas.

The Oath Project, a joint cadet-faculty effort to reinvigorate education on the Oath of Office into the Cadet Wing’s academic and military programs, is a model for other military educational institutions and units to emulate.³³ The program seeks to integrate the development of a democratic ethos into academic courses, military training, and ceremonies where the oath is administered. Key components of the Oath Project are outlined below.

America and Its Constitutional Foundations

The Oath Project seeks to facilitate a deeper understanding of how American democracy works and why it is worth fighting for. Understanding the nation’s founding and the workings of the democratic system that the Founders established will

31. Lolita C. Baldor, “Pentagon Issues Rules Aimed at Stopping Rise of Extremism,” *PBS News Hour*, December 20, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/>.

32. Nick Schifrin, “General Brown on Extremism in the Air Force, and Threats from China, Afghanistan,” *PBS News Hour*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/>.

33. Kelly E. Atkinson and Marybeth P. Ulrich, “Let’s Educate Service Members on Professional Ethos, Not Just Extremism,” *Hill*, June 6, 2021, <https://thehill.com/>.

strengthen Airmen's commitments to their oaths to defend it. Courses in political science, history, law, and leadership, among others, can be leveraged to explain democratic principles and to establish the historical-mindedness required for the development of a democratic ethos.

In a recent interview, former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates emphasized the imperative of teaching about the central role of compromise in American government:

That's what checks and balances are all about. Therefore, if you are willing to vote for people in Congress who have no intention of compromising, you don't understand how the American government is supposed to work—and that the only way to accomplish big things as a country is when members of Congress are willing to cross party lines or think about the interests of the country as a whole, and make compromises. No one gets his or her way all the time. That fundamental understanding of the criticality of compromise for the American experiment to work, I think, is a critical element of civics education.³⁴

Norms of Civil-Military Relations

A thorough understanding of American democracy will enable a strong understanding of the norms of civil-military relations. This is the subject area where professional Airmen can preserve democracy directly through their understanding of the role of democratic militaries. The central focus areas are: internalizing the principles of civilian control, nonpartisanship, and the relationship between armed forces and society in a democracy.

January 6th Insurrection Case Study

Airmen should be able to apply their understanding of constitutional foundations to the events of the January 6 insurrection. The Oath Project is developing curriculum that applies Airmen's understanding of the US democratic system to the conduct of elections.³⁵ Airmen should also be able to identify how the veterans who participated in the attacks misunderstood the democratic processes that govern elections and the peaceful transition of power. Reviewing the conduct of specific veterans and the consequences for their actions will help emphasize the professional norm and societal expectation that Airmen are members of the Air Force profession for life.

Ideological Geopolitical Competition

A comprehensive curriculum supporting the development of a democratic professional ethos also includes a comparative politics angle. Contrasting the United States's imperfect, but perfectible, model with authoritarian countries currently challenging

34. Juan Perez Jr., "Robert Gates: How Civics Education Became a National Security Issue," Politico, September 29, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/>.

35. Paul D. Eaton, Antonio M. Taguba, and Steven M. Anderson, "3 Retired Generals: The Military Must Prepare Now for a 2024 Insurrection," *Washington Post*, December 17, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

the Western democratic model gives American service members important insights into the fragility of democracy at home and the shortcomings of the alternative models abroad.

President Biden has framed his foreign policy as a geopolitical competition between models of governance and has argued the United States must lead the effort in proving American democracy and its model of democratic capitalism still work.³⁶ But China and Russia are increasingly coordinating their efforts to undermine democracy and position their autocratic models as superior alternatives.³⁷ The appeal of American values of democracy, human rights, and adherence to the rule of law undergirds American soft power and is our edge over our autocratic competitors. Renewing this aspect of the democratic ethos bolsters Airmen's wills to fight for American ideals.

Democratic Ethos and the Oath

The Oath Project encourages Air Force leaders at every level to educate Airmen on their obligations under the oath and to model their personal commitment to it. In the past year, Milley has repeatedly emphasized the importance and meaning of the oath. In so doing he has modeled the role that military leaders can play in renewing their democratic ethos through education. "The Constitution of the United States—the moral North Star of all in uniform—is that document that gives purpose to our service."³⁸ In his graduation address to the US Air Force Academy Class of 2021, Milley instructed:

There are over 190 countries in the world that are in the United Nations, but . . . the United States . . . is the only one to have a military that swears an oath to an idea, an idea contained in a document. We don't swear an oath to a king, a queen, a tyrant, or a dictator. We don't swear an oath to a person, a tribe, or a religion. No, we swear an oath to an idea . . . the idea that is America.³⁹

The Oath Project has also prioritized including oath education in every ceremony where the oath is featured, inserting language explaining the oath in the ceremony where Basic cadets first take the oath, commissioning ceremonies of graduating cadets, promotion and re-enlistment ceremonies, convocations, and graduations. Retired Air Force General Lori Robinson has advocated for leaders using such occasions to demonstrate their understanding and adherence to democratic principles. "Talk

36. David E. Sanger, "Biden Defines His Underlying Challenge with China: 'Prove Democracy Works' " *New York Times*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

37. Steven Lee Myers, "An Alliance of Autocracies? China Wants to Lead a New World Order," *New York Times*, March 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

38. "Gen. Milley: 'We Take an Oath to the Constitution,'" Associated Press, November 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

39. Mark Milley, "Joint Chiefs Chairman Delivers Commencement Speech to Air Force Academy's Class of 2021," 29:02 - 29:54, Department of Defense Videos, May 27, 2021, <https://dod.defense.gov/>.

about it all the time. Every time I did a promotion I would talk about why we swear the oath.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

The US Air Force will turn 75 years old on September 18, 2022—the day after Constitution Day, which commemorates the signing of the US Constitution on September 17, 1787. The Air Force can give the country a tremendous gift on its diamond anniversary—a recommitment to the democratic ethos that underpins the service of its Airmen. Understanding the responsibilities and obligations related to service members’ oaths should pervade professional development.

The US Air Force Academy Oath Project should be expanded to all commissioning sources, basic training, and postgraduate PME institutions. These programs should also be resourced and staffed to ensure they are sustained. Broadening the understanding of professional ethos to include the dual dimensions of democratic ethos and the currently pervasive warrior ethos will prepare Airmen who know both how to fight and what they are fighting for. A comprehensive effort to imbue service members in the constitutional obligations underpinning their service is the best way to commemorate the Air Force’s seventy-fifth birthday and the legacy of the airmen who served in the Army Air Forces in defense of American ideals. Æ

Marybeth P. Ulrich, PhD

Dr. Ulrich, Col, USAF (ret.), distinguished visiting professor of political science at the US Air Force Academy, professor of government at the US Army War College, and adjunct scholar at the Modern War Institute, is the author of *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces* (2000).

40. Lori Robinson, “Civics as a National Security Imperative: A Conversation with Senior Officers,” remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies online event, December 14, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/events/>.

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