

Nathan Moore  
Professor Hannah Zeavin  
History 182A  
14 March 2022

## A History of Modern Acquisition Programs: Military Leaders and Congress

### Abstract:

This paper will detail the history of two different periods of modern military acquisition programs. It will examine the relationships between military leadership, Congress, and the technology being developed. The paper will study the development of the naval nuclear power program, led by the controversial Admiral Rickover. This happened at the same time as the establishment of the military industrial complex. This naval nuclear power technology was developed successfully without major delays, safety issues, or cost overruns. The same cannot be said for many military acquisition programs today. This paper will also study the controversial development of the most expensive weapon system in history, the F-35 Lightning II fighter. It will also mention the costly V-22 Osprey aircraft, and a recent contrasting example from the Coast Guard in their quest for new ice breaking ships.

The realities that face the top leaders in the military force them to seek new technology. They do not or cannot simply buy more of old weapon systems for fear of losing the edge to the adversary or outdated materials and difficult maintenance. The politics of Congress, the contractors, and foreign strategy enable costly and ineffective programs. This is directly related to actor network theory. This current pattern was set forth with the hope of continuing past successes in weapons development. The path dependence that these institutions follow is staggering. Many of these programs start out of a form of techno-solutionism—hoping for deterring enemies or making wars winnable. However, all weapon systems have flaws upon

delivery and they continue the costly and harmful relationship between military leaders and Congress.

Outline:

1. Intro + thesis (the second paragraph contains most of the arguments I have now)
2. Background/development of naval nuclear program
3. Rickover relationship to congress (bribes, Jimmy Carter, staying in the job for way longer than should be possible due to relationships)
4. F-35
5. V-22 (examine technosolutionism, flaws, actor network theory in these two sections, path dependence)
6. Slight counter example (at least different) of the Coast Guard and ice breaking ships
7. Closing remarks

Likely References (may trim down):

R. Adm. H. G. Rickover. (1957). The Talented Mind. *The Science News-Letter*, 71(11), 170–173.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3937755>

WORTMAN, M. (2022). Rickover Made Us Do It. In *Admiral Hyman Rickover: Engineer of Power* (pp. 85–108). Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv28bqm48.7>

WORTMAN, M. (2022). The Longest-Serving Officer. In *Admiral Hyman Rickover: Engineer of Power* (pp. 231–251). Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv28bqm48.17>

Hamilton, B. A., Weston, B., & Ferguson, G. (2004). THE F-35 JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER. In

A. Borgu (Ed.), *A Big Deal: Australia's future air combat capability* (pp. 41–52).

Australian Strategic Policy Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04133.11>

Vucetic, S., & Nossal, K. R. (2012). The international politics of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

*International Journal*, 68(1), 3–12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42704957>

Freeman, B., & Eoyang, M. (2014). *Making the Case: The F-35 is the Future, Not the Present, of*

*U.S. Fighter Aircraft*. Third Way. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02573>

Donnelly, T., & Lohaus, P. (2013). The F-35 and Military Modernization. In *MASS and*

*SUPREMACY: A Comprehensive Case for the F-35* (pp. 28–34). American Enterprise

Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03140.9>

Tadjdeh, Y. (2016). Congress Boosts Coast Guard Budget. *National Defense*, 100(747), 36–38.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27021153>

TINGSTAD, A., SAVITZ, S., WOODS, D., & DREZNER, J. A. (2020). *The U.S. Coast Guard*

*Is Building an Icebreaker Fleet: What Comes Next? Issues and Challenges*. RAND

Corporation. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27750>