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Giant Spy Blimp Battle Could Decide Surveillance's Future

By [Noah Shachtman](#)

[Email Author](#)

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How many giant experimental spy blimps does the military need over Afghanistan, exactly? That's one of many questions the Senate Armed Services Committee is asking after an intramilitary battle has erupted over what many expect to be the future of aerial surveillance. The Army and the Air Force each have their own football field-sized airships in the works; the

Senate panel wants to know why it should pay for both — especially as the Air Force seems fickle about its model and keeps changing the spy sensors on board. Legislators are asking: What gives?

This is more than some obscure bureaucratic hair-pull. The answer to those questions — and the winners of those fights — could determine the direction of U.S. intelligence-gathering for years to come.

Here's why. Surveillance drones like the Predator and the Reaper are starting to lose just a bit of their sheen in military circles, even though their number of "orbits," or combat air patrols, has more than quadrupled in the last five years. Giant spy blimps are the new hotness. They can stay in the air for much longer than any drone. Instead of a Predator's single camera, the blimps can carry a whole bunch of surveillance equipment, because they're so freakin' huge. Any one of those sensors could spy on an entire town at once. There's even enough space on board the airship to process all that data in the sky, easing the burden on overloaded intelligence analysts.

A sign of the spy blimp's rising stock: Retired [Lt. Gen. David Deptula](#) — who, until recently, was in charge of all Air Force intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) programs — is now the CEO of MAV6, a Vicksburg, Mississippi, startup [building one of these next-gen airships for the military](#).

It's part of a project called "[Blue Devil](#)." The behemoth, 340-foot-long blimp and all of its spy gear should be ready for Air Force duty by January, Deptula promises. And if Blue Devil works as promised — staying four miles above Afghanistan for five days at a time — drones could suddenly seem like an expensive anachronism.

"It brings to bear a completely different concept for ISR: multiple sensors on one platform integrated with on-board processing and storage. It's the first time we're using a modular system on an aircraft to host a variety of sensors, and they can be rapidly changed for new or different sensors in a matter of hours," Deptula tells Danger Room. "We've got the world's largest ISR payload — and 'real estate' to host it, and nearly a supercomputer on board to process what they find."

The Pentagon is planning to spend \$4.5 billion to mount 15 more drone air patrols. The costs of operating, maintaining and processing the information from the roboplanes runs about \$8,000 per hour. Deptula claims Blue Devil would run \$1,000 per hour, because it requires fewer people (although that's just an educated guess; the thing hasn't flown yet). "A handful of Blue Devil orbits could achieve significantly greater ISR effectiveness for a fraction of that cost and save billions," he insists. For now, the Air Force is spending \$211 million on one of Deptula's blimps.

The Senate Armed Service Committee digs the idea. "There are many platforms and systems that advertise 'multisensor integration,' but almost always the different sensors ... cannot view the same piece of terrain at the same time," the committee notes in its recent report on next year's Pentagon budget. "Blue Devil is different: this QRC [quick reaction capability] is designed to give ground forces a new capability to detect, locate, identify, and track targets seamlessly, building on concepts and practices pioneered by special forces to tightly integrate sensors and pursuit operations."

But the committee "is concerned about recent turmoil in program plans," according to the report. For starters, Blue Devil isn't the only ginormous airship heading for Afghanistan. The Army has one in the works, too.

It's called the Long Endurance Multi-Intelligence Vehicle, or LEMV. It's being built by Northrop Grumman, the defense contracting behemoth. It's allegedly going to start casting its "[unblinking eye](#)" by January. And the LEMV supposed to stay in the skies for *weeks*, thanks to a combination of lighter-than-air helium and the aerodynamic lift you'd ordinarily see in

an airplane. Initial cost: \$517 million, for three airships. But, according to [InsideDefense.com](#), the Pentagon is already asking for another \$28 million.

Which naturally has lead the Senate Armed Service to ask why we need both of these things. “These developments raise the question of the value of Blue Devil Block 2,” the committee report reads.

“The Army now plans to deploy the LEMV to Afghanistan in the same timeframe as Blue Devil Block 2. Moreover, the Army is now planning to rapidly equip LEMV, after it is first demonstrated, with the same sensor systems that were originally planned for Blue Devil Block 2,” the committee adds. “The sensor changes raise questions about how effective and useful it will be, while progress in the LEMV program raises the issue of whether Blue Devil Block 2 funds would be better invested in LEMV program acceleration and expansion.”

LEMV may not be able to stay in the air quite as long as advertised. A recent [technical presentation](#) (.pdf) noted that the airship might stay aloft for a mere 10 days at a stretch.

Yet the Air Force is showing some signs of ambivalence about its Blue Devil airship. Turns out, the air service has grown rather attached to its current gaggle of spy planes.

That’s ironic, since it wasn’t that long ago that Defense Secretary Bob Gates complained that getting the Air Force to field more Predator and Reaper drones was like “[pulling teeth](#).” The upstart robo-planes were a threat to the air service’s established, man-in-the-cockpit fleet. Now, however, the upstarts have become the establishment. Drones form the bedrock of the Air Force’s surveillance effort.

“Big Safari” — that’s the code name for the Air Force office in charge of special intelligence programs — doesn’t appear to be quite ready to shift gears again. Especially not when shifting gears means putting a small company like Deptula’s in the driver’s seat.

“The Air Force transferred responsibility for Blue Devil recently to the Big Safari Program Office, which promptly proposed wholesale changes to the program — an entirely different platform, continued use of legacy [c]ameras, and different SIGINT [signals intelligence] sensors,” the Senate report notes.

Most of those changes were ultimately beaten back. But there are still open issues about the future of Blue Devil — and how the airship relates to its past.

The Blue Devil program started by packing a bunch of sensors together onto a turboprop plane. That surveillance gear includes eavesdropping equipment that can pinpoint a chatty militant’s location, as well as the Angel Fire “wide-area airborne surveillance system,” or WAAS. It’s a hive of nine separate cameras, each one shooting at a very slow rate and at a slightly different angle — allowing a whole town to be watched at once.

On the Blue Devil turboprop plane, the WAAS sensors and the eavesdropping unit can tell each other where to look or listen. According to the committee, that combo is now “making significant contributions” in southern Afghanistan, “particularly in support of prosecuting high-value targets.” In other words, it’s helping the military hunt down and kill militants.

But Deptula — and the Air Force — don’t just want to move that gear onto the airship for the second phase of Blue Devil. There’s talk of upgrading the WAAS sensor, from nine cameras to [92](#). Plus, the blimp has room for more and bigger antennas. And the more and bigger antennas you have, the easier it is to pinpoint locations. The blimp could be a much better eavesdropper. The Air Force and the ear-men at the National Security Agency are still wrestling over which signals intelligence package will fly on the airship.

Even muddier is the Air Force plan for what to do if the spy blimp wows the military if and when it goes to Afghanistan; there’s no follow-on effort in the budget, at the moment.

Making things murkier still is that there are [two more](#) giant blimp programs making their way through the military’s development chain.

The Armed Services Committee is kind of fed up. It’s demanding that the Pentagon appoint a single point person who can sort out which airship projects make sense, and which don’t. This

is *supposed* to a time of coming budget cuts, after all. The sky is pretty big. But it's not big enough for all these king-sized blimps.

Illo: Mav6

See Also:

- [All-Seeing Blimp Could Be Afghanistan's Biggest Brain](#)
- [Army Preps 'Unblinking Eye' Airship for Afghanistan](#)
- [Air Force Signs on to Darpa's All-Seeing Blimp](#)
- [Pimp My Blimp](#)
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Noah Shachtman is a contributing editor at *Wired* magazine, a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution and the editor of this little blog right here.

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grammy97

Why don't we just get out of Afghanistan, and not spend ANY money on these blimps?

11 months ago 25 Likes

Like



Jeffrey Nagy

Why don't we just not spend any money on anything what so ever?-Maybe its because we're the dominant soveriegn nation of the world and want to continue enjoying the benefits of that position.

Part of the advantage of these blimps is they allow us to be less dependent on satellites, which we are being edged out on more rapidly than any other technological edge. It allows the next generation satellites to be many billions less, with a handful of modular blimps that only cost in the millions.

11 months ago in reply to grammy97 10 Likes

Like

Carl, Carl JOHNSON: A beach bum based primarily out of Waikiki, Carl has cleverly...

As the richest country in the world, making military technology cheaper is strongly against our interests. This should be obvious. China makes but does not develop iPods. America is developing advanced robotic weaponry. In a war with China, what would happen? Well, at first our robots would be better, but then their industrial advantage would let them make cheap rip off robots and beat us with volume. Researching robots is

the Pentagon's worst nightmare, but they can't see more than one move ahead on the chessboard.

11 months ago in reply to Jeffrey Nagy 3 Likes

Like



zardinuk

As a programmer, I have to disagree. You are at a tremendous disadvantage if all you can do is reverse engineer what you can get your hands on. That is the route the soviets went, all of their technology is rip-off of the US, look at Buran.

11 months ago in reply to Carl 1 Like

Like



Jeffrey Nagy

Blimps as compared to satellites are cheaper mostly due to not having to be launched by rocket and the constraints space imposes on technology.

In a war with China we'd blockade them and destroy their ability to import and within months, they'd have mass starvation, bringing their war effort to grinding halt. Doesn't take much to stop a nation of a billion when they import more than 60% of their food, through a geographically limited sea lane.

11 months ago in reply to Carl 1 Like

Like



logicwins

war is such an amazing waste of US taxpayer wealth. vote independent at the federal level, Dems and Reps are the damn same.



11 months ago in reply to grammy97 6 Likes

Like

NR | ExP

You're sadly mistaken if you think Independents are going to change the way America is heading. Dems = Reps = Independents. The problems are bigger than any one party can tackle.

11 months ago in reply to logicwins 6 Likes

Like

**inqstvcat**

I prefer Libertarians and they have a better shot.

11 months ago in reply to logicwins 4 Likes

Like

**Brad**

Actually, defense spending largely preserves wealth - consider that most defense dollars go to US based contractors who only employ US citizens, and their suppliers are largely also US based companies. The \$2B we send to Pakistan in aide is lost wealth, as is the billions per year we send to Venezuela and Saudi Arabia as payment for oil.

11 months ago in reply to logicwins 4 Likes

Like

**Ryan Kohler**

Defense dollars go to US based contractors who then use the money on shit that blows up in another country. That doesn't preserve wealth. Wealth does not equate to money; wealth is things that makes our lives better. There is nothing about huge defense spending that makes anybody's life better (although, there are those cases where it can, you know, keep everybody's life from getting much worse, but Afghanistan is no longer one of those cases)

11 months ago in reply to Brad 5 Likes

Like

**sgtbilko**

"Wealth does not equate to money; wealth is things that makes our lives better."



OK, then I as a defense contractor will happily continue to take your tax money, since it wouldn't make your life any better. See? we can both get what we want.

11 months ago in reply to Ryan Kohler 5 Likes

Like

**HamishMcTaggart**

opportunity cost, sir.

11 months ago in reply to sgtbilko

Like

**VultureTX**

Yeah what Bilko said!

11 months ago in reply to sgtbilko

Like

**jakeefer**

Defense spending makes my life better. It paid for my degree and pays my salary. I currently have the highest paying job I've ever had and get to travel all over the world.

11 months ago in reply to Ryan Kohler 3 Likes

Like

Vexxarr, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Crash Diffe...

Actually wealth is/are assets that remain in your possession after investment and expenses. It has nothing whatsoever to do with quality of life. In a best case wealth SHOULD improve your life. But that isn't necessary. If defense contractors produce goods that explode overseas - you are right. Some wealth is generated for employees and investors but assets and wealth are lost.

But if the defense contractors produce systems that are SOLD overseas, then wealth is accumulated and contracts that provide a revenue stream are generated.

Bonus, if your enemy fields your weapons, you not only know how to defeat them but you know that the weapons YOU field are at least two generations superior to their weapons.

Crazy? Sure. But that is one way defense contractors actually generate wealth.

11 months ago in reply to Ryan Kohler 1 Like

Like

**jakeefer**

Actually, many of our current defense technologies are sold to other countries, albeit in watered down forms.

11 months ago in reply to Vexxarr

Like

**Vexxarr**, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

Double post

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer 1 Like

Like

**Vexxarr**, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

You are correct.



Speaking with some experience here. This is only true of non-critical defense technologies. Time was any weapons platform had to be three generations out of deployment before it was available for international sale. Now the Pentagon allows immediate sale of non-critical systems or non-emerging technologies. Also, major platform manufacturers (oh, Boeing - for example) are allowed to make export variations of weapons platforms for immediate sale. Current policy does not allow strategic technologies to be sold outside of NATO.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like

**Vexxarr**, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

Double Post

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like

Vexxarr, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

Double Post

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like



Vexxarr, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

Double Post

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like



Vexxarr, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

Double Post

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like



Vexxarr, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Cr...

Double Post

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like



Vexxarr, Webartist, writer and filmmaker. Author of the Crash Different Mac 'switch' parody.

I think the answer is - right or wrong we're IN now. If we just pull out, those who aided and worked with the US will likely be slaughtered. Whatever the wisdom of going in (and we had to go in - they had no plans to stop with one attack) we now owe it to the lives of those we protect there.

There is no good exit strategy. The Afghan military isn't going to 'step up'. They don't understand chain of command. They don't have a solid enough allegiance to country over family or clan. When we exit - and we will - it will be a slow spiral back to anarchy and we'll be back in the future. Doubtless after some other unthinkable attack.

I would LOVE to be out. Out today. But Wiser souls than I have examined the exit and so far there is not a single optimistic plan. Likely we will pull out. The warlords will wipe out the towns and villages beyond the influence of national police while Hamid Karzai robs his own country blind.



11 months ago in reply to grammy97 5 Likes

Like

**Mike Greco**

At what altitude do these blimps loiter? And how hard would it be for someone to put a small explosive charge on a remote-controlled model airplane and fly that into one of these blimps? Oh, shit. Did I just fuck up a billion dollar R&D project? Pst...Darpa, hire me to brainstorm for you.

11 months ago 7 Likes

Like

**Jeffrey Nagy**

In general, commercial blimps aren't design for high altitude... they're designed to fly about 7000 ft so they can be seen, but there is no reason they can't be built to fly higher. For example Lockheed built an airship designed to operate for protracted flight of days at 70,000 ft, but can likely go higher. Most drones operate at less than 10,000 ft with very few operating at 30,000ft.

Next it would take more than a small explosive to take out something as big as a "football field"... first these use helium, not the more energetic hydrogen, so its not going to explode. Second, in WWI, even when airships were filled with hydrogen it took alot of effort to bring them down. A modern airship, first a warhead would have to be either specially designed to sense the helium or dangerously sensitive to decelartion to detect penetrating the membrane of the baloon... neither are easy. Next if you detonated an explosive on the outside of the structure it just pushes the baloon, since its lighter than air...it do some damage but to damage the membrane extensively enough to cause altitude loss, would require an 18-wheeler truck sized hole along the topside of the balloon, since the volume is just that great.

11 months ago in reply to Mike Greco 11 Likes

Like

**Brett Nemeroff**

Jeffrey, thanks for this explanation. Can you explain why a basketball sized hole isn't considered extensive enough damage to cause altitude loss? Isn't that a function of how long it intends to remain airborne? Seems like it would be constantly losing helium?

11 months ago in reply to Jeffrey Nagy 1 Like

Like

Jeffrey Nagy

Ben and Timothy both have it. Even in the extreme hypothetical where more than half the sections have small holes in them, the overall volume is so great it would take hours to be emptied through such small openings, even at a high flow rate.

11 months ago in reply to Brett Nemeroff 1 Like

Like



Benjamin Jordan

Because the cavity holding the helium is sectioned off. Like bulkheads on a ship.

11 months ago in reply to Brett Nemeroff 1 Like

Like



Timothy Culley

You would constantly be losing helium, but it would take an extremely long time to lose enough that you would no longer be lighter than air. You probably wouldn't be finishing your week long mission, but you could easily land at an air field and be patched up.

Side note: It would be extremely difficult to put a basketball size hole in something that is 70,000 ft in the air (13.25 miles).

11 months ago in reply to Brett Nemeroff 1 Like

Like



Full Metal Pizza

Compartments. Designers would be crazy to leave all that gas in one single container.

11 months ago in reply to Brett Nemeroff

Like

jakeefer

This is why most anti-aircraft missiles have fragmentation charges. It's not just a shockwave that's going to bring these things down. Further, anti-aircraft technology has come a LONG way since WWI.

11 months ago in reply to Jeffrey Nagy 1 Like

Like

**Tudor Rosca**

The actual thing is not all filled with Helium. It has small compartments inside and these are located at the top of the structure. An AA projectile exploding over it would be pretty expensive as it would require precision flying and direction

Invalid Application ID: The provided Application ID is invalid.

In addition to that, you can do in-flight repairs (automatic) by having compressed HE tubes and membranes built into it. If too many "pockets" get penetrated, the secondary systems can inflate, heat a bit and problem solved.

In addition to even that, protection is also way beyond WW1 :) The HE pockets inside the airship can have the lower part made out of kevlar and very strong polymers. A fragmentation projectile would have a very hard time penetrating it.

As opposed to winged aircraft, the weight limits on such an airship would be insane. The Soviets placed armor plating on their SU-37 for example. There are some nice vids on YouTube with a 20mm AP round being shot at the cockpit of a SU-37.

So...

1. Flying at 30.000+ feet (Few projectiles can reach that altitude)
2. In-air repairs possible and very inexpensive and "simple".
3. Armored skin for the HE "tanks".

It can hold it's own very well.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer 2 Likes

Like

jakeefer

So...

1. Russia's S-300 series SAM's have a max ceiling of 100,000ft.
2. In-air repairs implies a crew is going to want to sit in this thing.

3. 300lb-600lb (the standard load for an S series SAM) warheads would obliterate this thing.

Keep in mind a 155mm howitzer shell that weighs between 90-100 pounds can destroy an M1 Abrams with a direct hit. We'd be talking a bout hitting this thing with significantly larger warheads.... Helium won't float enough armor to save that.

My main argument is still valid. This would be great for low tech wars, but we don't need any more low tech war toys that cost too much money. In a conventional war, this thing would be useless.

11 months ago in reply to Tudor Rosca 1 Like

Like



VultureTX

question when did we solve the storage problems for liquid helium? it bleeds off from the tanks through any material from what I remember.

11 months ago in reply to Tudor Rosca

Like

Jeffrey Nagy

No durrrrrrrr...

I'm not saying it wouldn't be possible to design a new missile specifically to take this out. I'm saying its stupid to think an off the shelf remote control plane with some high explosive strapped to the nose is going to take it down.



In general shooting down a blimp poses a number of design issues, that would have to be addressed. If you just shot a pre-existing air-to-air missile, you probably wouldn't hit the blimp. It has little heat and infrared signature to be picked up by the missile. This means your using a medium to long range ground based missile that can rely on radar for guidance. This is failure in strategic planning but lets say such an off the shelf system is operating. Even at short

ranges those missiles still require IR to achieve a target lock. That's going to be difficult. You might detect and hit its engine, which is proportionally small to the overall blimp, but that won't necessarily bring it down. Even still you're talking about a missile designed to blanket a jet with shrapnel, not make jet sized holes in a blimp. You'd be going through a lot of missiles to shoot it down. Meanwhile a whole lot of people would have to NOT be doing their jobs elsewhere.

This isn't a combat aircraft, that means there should be several F-35s and F16s between any missiles and the blimp. Losing this would require an event as reckless as allowing a C5 fully loaded with troops and equipment to be shot down... the loaded C5 would actually be more expensive and more likely given their numbers.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer 2 Likes

Like



jujutsuka

I imagine there might also be sensors on the blimp to calculate the missile trajectory, or this would at least be done on the ground. Not a good scenario to take potshots at the blimp that help give away your location. Cue a response from helicopter gunships (or whatever means) and it's a bad day for some insurgents.



11 months ago in reply to Jeffrey Nagy 1 Like

Like



jakeefer

This is why SAM launchers utilize shoot and move tactics when deployed in forward environments. Obviously, you don't want to hang out in a position you've marked for the enemy.

11 months ago in reply to jujutsuka

Like

jakeefer

I'm not talking about "new missiles", I'm talking about missiles Russia has had since 1970. 300 and 400 series SAMS are radar guided and this thing is a giant radar target.

Hitting a blimp would pose virtually no design issues considering SAMS are designed to hit rapidly moving and agile targets, this would be like shooting a shotgun at the broad side of a barn at 10ft.

11 months ago in reply to Jeffrey Nagy

Like



Jeffrey Nagy

You do realize that all those missile systems are quite expensive. A SAM S-300 battery is about a \$300M system. Though Saudi Arabia ordered some, Russia is the only country to have any; they have 16. You're talking about using a \$400M system to take out a \$250M system and you ignore the non-combat nature of this. Any enemy willing to shoot one of these blimps down could do far more damage attacking other targets... like loaded C-5s.... or even the squadrons of fighters and missiles that would be shooting right for it.

That said this missile is not designed to shoot down anything as large as a blimp. The S-400's missiles are designed to intercept other missiles. Its accurate enough to hit a blimp, it just doesn't physically carry enough explosive capability.

Next the longest range 40N6 missile for the S-400 was never put into production. It was held back and rolled over into the S-500 program. So the range you keep throwing out their isn't a realistic one.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer 3 Likes

Like



jakeefer

Nagy.... c'mon now.... Gary Power's U-2 was shot down from 65,000ft in 1961 over russia by an SA-2 missile.... A dinosaur compared to current missiles... Continue to ramble below so you can make yourself feel better.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer

Like



SanemD

not to mention that it'll have the cargo capacity and power to use defensive systems, like the seeker-blinding lasers used on helicopters or chaff

11 months ago in reply to Jeffrey Nagy

Like



daemonbarber

Not only do they fly 4 miles up, they can withstand quite a lot of punishment. If a missile won't take it down, I'm pretty sure your RC airplane is just going to tell them where to send the reaper drones.

11 months ago in reply to Mike Greco 2 Likes

Like



Randy Norian

Rest assured: Russia, China or Iran will rapidly supply our opposition with whatever they need to bring down a fat target like a blimp.

11 months ago in reply to daemonbarber 4 Likes

Like



jakeefer

A modern missile would destroy these things. Jeff is quite mistaken.

11 months ago in reply to daemonbarber 1 Like

Like

Jason Williams



They're intended for permissive environments. You need control of the air before you can control the kind of ground you'd need to house on of these things prior to flight.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer 1 Like

Like



jakeefer

Permissive environment... should be read.... dumb war or a war we're already winning.... so... why should we spend so much on these things when we already have super expensive drones that we've paid for.

11 months ago in reply to Jason Williams

Like



Jason Williams

Because these allow more persistent coverage, with fewer people, than drones. Afghanistan is a big place, it takes a lot of Predators to cover every area, and they eventually have to land and refuel. A blimp like this, however, can keep an eye on a suspected insurgent safehouse for a week at a time, building up a pretty comprehensive picture.

Sort of like why the UK has cameras on every street corner, instead of putting a patrol car with a cop to watch every street corner.

11 months ago in reply to jakeefer 1 Like

Like



SanemD

modern blimps can indeed resist bullets, missiles and even lightning strikes. the reason for this being its size, the air inside can't get out fast enough to cause a crash, the worst that can happen is a slow descent



11 months ago in reply to daemonbarber

Like

slozomby

"staying four miles above Afghanistan" 20k feet is a little past your average remote controlled model airplane.

11 months ago in reply to Mike Greco

Like



Tim McCormack

The article states that they are designed to "loiter" at 4 miles.

11 months ago in reply to Mike Greco

Like



toddsherman

FTA: "four miles".

11 months ago in reply to Mike Greco

Like



debasser

Wait so the guy who used to be in charge of intelligence at the Air Force is now in charge of building the blimps in the private sector and selling it back to the Air Force? Apparently situations where there is a conflict of interest applies only to your average good corporate citizen.

11 months ago 5 Likes

Like



Bryan Junker

It'd be a conflict of interest if he still worked for the Air Force. It isn't since he is retired and therefore no longer involved in making those decisions.

11 months ago in reply to debasser 1 Like

Like



justanotherengineer

No, his buddies are in charge of making those decisions now. The startup I worked for hired an ex-admiral for the same reason. Market penetration.

11 months ago in reply to Bryan Junker 2 Likes

Like



[jakeefer](#)

But, his buddies are..... and some congressman that holds stock in the company he works for.

11 months ago in reply to Bryan Junker 1 Like

Like



Keith Gregory

hhhhhhhhhh

11 months ago in reply to Bryan Junker

Like



Kyle Framin

This is going to be used to cut down individual rights and freedoms right here in USA. Just wait 3 - 5 years. You think Government is your friend? Good luck to ya.

11 months ago 4 Likes

Like



Mike Barbetta

"Carrier has arrived."

11 months ago 4 Likes

Like



Taco Dunam

Funny. I was thinking: science vessel has returned.

11 months ago in reply to Mike Barbetta

Like



cheeseman12243


As long as the Mexicans, Afghans and Iraqis don't buy SA-21's were all good

11 months ago 4 Likes

Like

[jakeefer](#)



 Older Sa-8's are a lot cheaper and just as effective against targets that are barely moving.... Hell... a stinger would probably solve this equation.

11 months ago in reply to cheeseman12243

Like



mark wilk

If the AF really wants a blimp force, they should prevent the rest of the US helium reserve from being sold off. Be kind of embarrassing to build this thing and have nothing to fill it with.

11 months ago 3 Likes

Like



Zach Deptula

That Deptula sounds like a real cool guy

11 months ago 3 Likes

Like



PeteEllis

The blimps we used in Iraq were very hard to control. Winds blew them around so they were not able to stay focused on their intended targets. The tethers were dangerous for the troops to be around as well. I wonder if these new blimps have overcome those short comings?

11 months ago 2 Likes

Like



jakeefer

doubtful.... The TM probably says they have though....


11 months ago in reply to PeteEllis

Like



stevo205

Giant spy blimps are the new hotness.

 figured that sentence needed to be emphasized.

11 months ago 2 Likes

Like


EricLR

These new "air ships" are the bee's knees. We must deploy them with His Majesty's finest men to the Belgium Congo immediately. We'll box the huns' ears in no time with these magnificent flying machines!

11 months ago in reply to stevo205 3 Likes

Like


Sam

All they need is to give them big floodlights on the front and send them floating around city skies, and then....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v...>

11 months ago 2 Likes

Like


Dean Cripe

WE CANNOT AFFORD IT! Sure, it's neat & cool. BUT.....WE ARE BROKE! Who continues to deny this?

11 months ago 1 Like

Like


Robert M

Correct me if I am incorrect, wouldn't the whole billion dollar enterprise be nuetralized by vietnam war era black market soviet or other high altitude missile? couple hundred grand a pop?

11 months ago 1 Like

Like


Miguel Peschiera

Helium is a scarce resource that needs to be mined and, unlike pretty much everything else, actually exits the planet when it's leaked so it can never be recovered. Its price is artificially depreciated because the government decided in the mid nineties to get rid of the helium reserve it had stockpiled since the 1920s by 2015, a decision that hasn't been reversed. Helium is going to get very expensive very soon.

11 months ago 1 Like

Like

**mark wilk**

I made pretty much the same comment earlier. Another example of government agencies working against each other. The AF proposes something that will require large amounts of helium while another branch of government is making sure helium will be less available and much more expensive in the future.

11 months ago in reply to Miguel Peschiera 1 Like

Like

**baseboru**

One Vietnam-era Russian SA-2 surface-to-air missile would ruin their whole day.

11 months ago 1 Like

Like

**MatthewC**

I thought the point in drones was that they were small enough to not be noticed. Can someone tell me how a freaking Blimp does not get noticed then shot down by SAM missile batteries let alone fighter jets??

11 months ago 1 Like

Like

**BallzMan123452**

These Blimps wouldn't operate in area's where SAM's could reach them

11 months ago in reply to MatthewC

Like

**VultureTX**

news alert, The Taliban have trucks.

11 months ago in reply to BallzMan123452 1 Like

Like

**PotatoKing5621**

They have trucks, but no SAM's

11 months ago in reply to VultureTX

Like



stevo205

And alas, with no SAM's, I'm afraid ham is out of the question as well.

11 months ago in reply to PotatoKing5621 1 Like

Like



jakeefer

..... yet

11 months ago in reply to PotatoKing5621

Like

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