

## **Pilots Could Be Punished After Speaking Up About Deadly F-22 Fleet**

Two US Air Force pilots who spoke out against unresolved issues onboard the multi-million dollar F-22 Raptor fleet may face punishment from the Pentagon, even though they are covered under the Whistleblower Protection Act.

Despite ongoing reports of malfunctions with the plane's oxygen-supply system, the Air Force has urged its pilots to keep soaring into the sky on the F-22s. At least one pilot has been killed during a malfunction so far.

Major Jeremy Gordon and Captain Josh Wilson appeared on CBS News' 60 Minutes last week to announce their continuing worries over the Raptor stealth jet. The pilots spoke out against the craft while accompanied by a US congressman, Representative Adam Kinzinger (R-Illinois), an escort insisted by the pilots because they feared that the military would reprimand them for their disclosure. Now both say they are willing to re-board Raptor jets, even after going on national television to voice their concerns with the aircraft. That might not be enough, though.

Since announcing their issues with the craft on 60 Minutes, other lawmakers within the US Congress have asked for further investigations with the Raptor fleet. Even with this urging, though, the Pentagon might follow through with a military procedure that could pull both pilots out of the ranks of America's Armed Forces.

Although Congress is considering a probe of the plane, the US Air Force has yet to announce that it will reverse a letter of reprimand that was sent to Capt. Wilson. The pilot's attorney, Frederic Morgan, tells the Daily Press that his client is willing to fly, but the Pentagon has yet to approve that privilege for him.

If the letter of reprimand remains on file, it could lead to a meeting with the Flying Evaluation Board and eventually the termination of the pilot's career. This news comes despite Rep. Kinzinger's representation as an elected official who has vowed to protect the pilots.

"Congress granted protection to whistleblowers in general and specifically military to say: if you have a concern, you know – not something obviously little – but something pretty big and serious... you have a right to talk to your congressman,"

Rep. Kinzinger told CBS last week, "because just 'cause you join the military doesn't mean you give up your right to citizenship."

Adding to the news program, Morgan revealed that General Janet Wolfenbarger informed the Senate Armed Services Committee that both pilots "are fully protected from reprisal by the Military Whistleblower Protection Act."

The military has yet to reverse the letter of reprimand, though.

In an article last year for the Military Times, Mathew B. Tully explains that such a letter could

essentially end the career of a serviceman such as Capt. Wilson.

"An LOR, if filed in your official military personnel file, can ruin your prospects for promotion or lead to separation,"

wrote Tully.

Following a 2010 incident in Afghanistan that resulted in the deaths of several civilians, then-commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, authorized four LORs for high-ranking officers involved in the mishap. On their own part, the Los Angeles Times explained, "A letter of reprimand usually means that an officer's career is effectively over."

Frederic Morgan acknowledged that despite the backing of the some congressmem, that could be the outcome his client will face.

"We now look forward to the prompt withdrawal of the Letter of Reprimand against Captain Wilson, the termination of the Flying Evaluation Board proceeding, the reinstatement of his job and his promotion to Major, and the return of these fine officers to the service of their Nation at the controls of the airplane they love,"

Morgan says in a statement.

Rep. Kinzinger also adds that he believes that the Air Force "want[s] to solve this problem" and should revoke the letter, although they have yet to formally do so, reports the Daily Press.

As RT reported on Thursday, sources within the US intelligence community say that the CIA is opening up a probe of their own into the separate matter of the leaking of classified information related to the alleged al-Qaeda bomb plot that was foiled this week. If those reports are confirmed, that would make only the second time this week that the Obama administration has gone after whistleblowers for leaking information.