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The US Air Force and Irregular Warfare: Success as a Hurdle

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The Air Force's difficulty transforming to support irregular forms of warfare is the most pressing issue facing the institution today. The United States Army, Marines Corps, and special operations forces rely on the Air Force's ability to deliver desired effects on the battlefield. Current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are harbingers regarding the ascendance of low-intensity conflict (LIC).[1] Irregular warfare (IW) is yet another classification of war and the use of asymmetric tactics are generally ascribed to it. Colin Gray, a preeminent strategist states that irregular warfare "calls for cultural, political, and military qualities that are not among the traditional strengths of Americans."[2] For the Air Force, adapting to a bifurcated strategic environment is a challenge. To be sure, the Air Force has provided the nation with decades of unparalleled excellence in pursuit of air dominance. The point is not to quibble over whether the Air Force can perform its mission in large-scale conventional warfare, but to the degree to which the institution adapts to contemporary security threats. It is a matter of focusing resources and investing in ideas that optimize the unique characteristics of airpower while at the same time meet the traditional expectations of an air force. Three aspects composing Air Force identity influence the institution's ability to meet organizational demands: the pursuit of technology, a culture of individualism, and the theory of progressive airpower. In fact, the factors facilitating the Air Force's institutional success simultaneously limit its ability to adapt to irregular warfare.

Air Force Institutional Culture and Success

Because the US Air Force has enjoyed an impressive era of hegemony it is important to consider the foundations of its success in order to discern future trajectories. A distinct Air Force culture is responsible for the institution's rise and sustained level of operational excellence. As a matter of definition, military culture "comprises the attitudes, values, goals, beliefs, and behaviors characteristic of the institution that are rooted in traditions, customs, and practices and influenced by leadership."[3] What then defines the United States Air Force's military culture and how the institution pursued its key tasks? A hallmark of Air Force culture is the rigorous application of advanced technology. Second, the Air Force is an institution built on a mantle of individualism. Third, the Air Force is the world's military leader in the application of technology through the construct of progressive airpower theory. All factors—reliance on technology, individuality, and

[1] Colin, Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, (London: Phoenix Publishing, 2005), 214-254.
[2] Colin Gray, "Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters", (Maxwell AFB, Strategic Studies Quarterly, Winter 2007), 35-47.
[3] Michael Siegl, *Military Culture and Transformation*, (Norfolk, Va: JFQ, issue 49, 2d quarter 2008), 103.

an almost divine belief in airpower's ability to yield decisive effects—have shaped the development of an unique Air Force culture.

The first concept that defines Air Force culture, technology, is all too obvious. The exploitation of powered flight proved to be an exceptional military advantage in the early twentieth century. The US Army Air Corps (subsequently becoming the Air Force) made the advancement of technology a priority throughout the institution's evolution. In almost philosophical terms, one of airpower's greatest theorists, Col Phillip Meilinger wrote this in his ninth proposition of airpower: "technology and airpower are integrally and synergistically related."[4] To borrow his language, the centrality of technology is a recurring theme in the Air Force. In fact, RAND expert Carl Builder described the relationship in almost religious terms stating:

> "The Air Force could be said to worship at the altar of technology. The airplane was the instrument that gave birth to independent air forces; and the airplane has, from its inception, been an expression of the miracles of technology. . . . There is a circle of faith here: If the Air Force fosters technology, then that inexhaustible fountain of technology will ensure an open-ended future for flight (in airplanes and spacecraft); and that, in turn, will ensure the future of the Air Force."[5]

From its inception as a separate institution, the Air Force has retained a strong sense of individuality. After-all, the Air Force *was* the Army Air Corps. Since the creation of a separate Air Force in 1947, the service has charted its own course through the pursuit and application of advanced machinery. While accepting technology as a matter of central importance and to avoid eschewing the human dimension, Air Force personnel developed around functionally aligned groups. As one author writes, the institutional growth led to "a culture in which small, often technology-based, subcultures flourish."[6] These "subcultures" prosper because as Carl Builder says "loyalty has devolved to functions, technologies, and occupations."[7] In the Air Force today, subcultures can best be understood in terms of airframes, or lack of airframes (these are the supporting tasks to the flying mission), associated with certain jobs. For example, fighter, bomber, and airlift pilots all represent sections of the Air Force that actively fly machines. Their identity is best characterized by the type of airframe they command. However, there are those in the Air Force that *do not* fly. For these airmen, they are best characterized by their supporting function in the organization. The functionally aligned airmen are divided across space, missile, intelligence, and other fields.

Because of the unique division between those that indentify themselves with airframes and those functionally aligned (often in supporting roles) how does one discern which group is preeminent? If history is any indicator, the answer is simple: fighter pilots. Of the all the Chiefs of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), 75% were fighter pilots. Fighter pilots—those who currently fly A-10s, F-15s, F-16s, F-22s—are the preeminent groups in the Air Force. Fighter pilots are,

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[4] Col Phillip Meilinger, *Ten Propositions Regarding Airpower*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, 1995, 56.
[5] Lt Col (ret) James M. Smith, "Air Force Culture and Cohesion", *Airpower Journal*, Fall 1998.
[6] Maj William C. Thomas, "The Cultural Identity of the United States Air Force", *Air and Space Power Journal*, 30 January 2004.
[7] Smith.

first and foremost, individuals. They embody what is valued most in the Air Force: the ability to single-handedly wield an advanced technological machine in combat. Because they are largely the leaders of the organization they are the "elite profession" that defines "the essence, sets the culture, and determines the vision that exemplifies the organization."[8] Furthermore, and with more effect, Lt Col Smith states that these elite "promote these career personnel into the decision- and policy-making levels within their career elite with only limited external veto and no real external competition. The service culture is institutionalized by the organization and internalized by its members." Indeed, the central tasks to "Fly, Fight, and Win" are clearly the current goals of the Air Force—fighter pilots aptly realize this vision.

Technology and individualism are central tenets of Air Force culture, but how are they translated into the theory and doctrine that has developed at the core of the institution? Over time, the Air Force developed theories of airpower based on advances in technology. The Air Force institutionalized the norm that the understanding and application of technology is largely superior to the pursuit of theory.[9] Technology and independence empowered airpower theorists to develop theory, doctrine, and strategy all their own. The subsequent result of the confluence of these unique factors is best understood as progressive airpower theory.

At first look, progressive airpower theory appears to be of immense utility. The paragon of airpower theorists promise to deliver quick capitulation of the enemy. Decapitation of an enemy government and disabling synergistic effects applied across its command and control nodes cause the enemy to seize up and do nothing but withstand the relentless aerial bombardment. The official slogan is: no US ground troops required. The crux of the theory is based on the vigorous application of technology to solve tactical problem-sets in order to achieve the desired effect. Borrowing from Col Meilinger again, "Americans have a tendency to adopt technological solutions to problems, and this is evidenced in our approach to war."[10] Carl Builder posited that "while many of the Air Force's original values were derived from airpower theory, the Air Force abandoned theory in favor of a focus on technology soon after its inception as a separate service."[11] As we consider progressive airpower theory, it is of great use to review how technology is applied at tactical, operational, and strategic planes.

The Air Force translates excellence at the tactical level into operational success through the rigorous application of technology by its pilots and enlisted forces. Admittedly, a generalized, oversimplified tactical problem can be defined as such: for whatever reason a Joint Forces Commander (JFC) wants a bridge to be destroyed at X time. The Air Force analyzes how the commander's intent can be met (with consideration given to threats to aircraft, achievement of air superiority if not already attained, etc.), chooses the best course of action (bearing in mind weaponeering, fuel constraints, targeting), and executes. The JFC inherits a destroyed bridge meeting the intent—whatever it may be. What common theme prevailed while the Air Force carried out its task at the tactical level of war? The ability of the American airmen to exploit technology while overcoming an enemy's defensive strategy and machinery is what enables dominant airpower. While personnel highly trained to exploit technology account for an

[8] Thomas.
[9] Thomas.
[10] Meilinger, 58.
[11] Smith.

impressive ability to achieve tactical success there is a more interesting dynamic at the operational level of war. The Air Force's prime contribution to any theater is its flexibility to command and control airpower at the operational level of warfare.[12]

For the Air Force, operational doctrine "guides the proper organization and employment of air and space forces in the context of distinct objectives, force capabilities, broad functional areas, and operational environments".[13] The organization that functions at the core of the operational level of warfare is the Air Operations Center (or Joint / Combined AOC, as required). The AOC functions as a clearing house in order to maximize efficient and effective apportionment and allocation of airpower.[14] What factors contribute to the success of the AOC and airpower at the operational level of warfare? Is it organizational or technical in nature? The answer is both. First, the technology employed by pilots at the tactical level is often dictated by planners at the AOC. Details (weapons fuzing and bomb-load) are chosen based on a standard requirement of the ground user. It is deemed a "standard combat load" which provides a reasonable expectation of bomb load-out to the Joint Terminal Attack Controller or other ground party. The second half of the issue, the organization of the AOC, is immensely important. The ability to command and control aircraft in order to prioritize the needs of the Joint Forces Commanders is exactly what allows the AOC to excel at the operational level of war. Airpower's inherent flexibility is exploited best at the operational level—a fact that often goes unopposed. However, a more contentious debate surrounds how airpower should be used in support of individual services.

Traditionally, the Air Force and Army view the use of airpower from vastly opposing perspectives. The Army views airpower as another avenue to pursue fires and collection of data on the enemy in support of ground combat forces—largely at the tactical and operational levels of war. On the contrary, Air Force airpower enthusiasts see a more strategic use. Throughout the development of airpower theory, doctrine, and its application, the promise was made possible by faith in airpower's ability. Since World War I, air forces have chafed at the thought their planes be used to support ground and seas forces.[15] As the nuclear mission waned with the fall of Russia, so too did singularity in purpose for the Air Force. Instead of the nuclear enterprise as a primary function for the Air Force, the use of airpower was relied upon in myriad lesser tasks. Furthermore, according to a 1989 White Paper circulated amongst Headquarters USAF, the Air Force had lost its identity because of the fragmentation that came with a requirement to support diverse mission sets. The centrifugal force weakened the Air Force's ability to present itself to others—namely whether airpower should be used to support ground forces or as a unilateral instrument. During this time, true airpower believers clung to the ideology airpower can and will someday replace ground and seapower. Col John Warden published *The Air Campaign* seeking to rectify airpower's application at the operational and strategic levels of warfare. Subsequently, the application of his theory during the first Gulf War, dealt a deathblow to airpower's naysayers.

[12] Lecture, Lt Gen Michael Short, United States Air Force Weapons School, Nellis Air Force Base, 5 October 2008.
[13] Air Force Doctrine Document 1, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, 17 Nov 03.
[14] Efficiency, effectiveness, apportionment, and allocation of airpower all convey nuanced meanings in the Air Force lexicon—I chose to forgo explanation in favor of brevity.
[15] Adams, Thomas. *The Army After Next: The First Post-Industrial Army*, (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 2.

The domain of Air Force continued to expand after the first Gulf War. General Colin Powell viewed the tension between Army and Air Force staffers as a poison in the Joint Staff and ordered resolutions be found to key differences. What was produced could be confused for a second version of Air-Land battle—much to the chagrin of many Air Force leaders.[16] Regardless, as the Army withdrew from its enclaves throughout the world in a drawdown of forces, the Air Force obviously sought to the fill the strategic gap with theories and doctrine such as "force projection" and the idea of "Global Reach, Global Power". In 1996, for the first time, an Air Force Chief of Staff disagreed with a combatant commander's use of airpower in a standing concept of operation. The fallout included a review aimed to develop strategic analysis that was "air-dominant rather than land-centric".[17] Riding the wave of success following Operation Deliberate Force, the Air Force proclaimed it would be able to "find, fix or track, and target—in near real time—anything of consequence that moves upon or is located on the face of the earth".[18] The Air Force believes airpower's heydey has arrived to stay because of its success in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the organizational history reveals, many progressive airpower theorists seek to replace the view that airpower's primary role was to support ground forces with a belief (in extreme faith) in its ability to single-handedly capitulate an enemy.[19]

It is clear what factors are responsible for the Air Force's success as an institution. To be sure, no other military service has enjoyed such global dominance in comparison to its peers. The US Air Force is completely unrivaled regarding the application of air power across the globe. The reasons for this success, an institutional culture dependent upon technology, fierce individuality, and progressive airpower theory are perpetuated by an elite corps who are continuously promoted to positions of leadership. Although the Air Force has performed its mission exceptionally well thus far in its history, this fact is becoming increasingly irrelevant as demands change.

Irregular Warfare, Adaptation, and the Air Force

In order for the Air Force to remain relevant it is important to recognize how policy is altered through the strategic process. Clausewitz outlined three phases of strategic formulation.[20] The first phase of strategic formulation is understanding the nature of war. Without proper context, strategies are easily misguided. Second, comprehending the nature of war is "essential for identifying a comparative or relative strategic advantage".[21] The final phase of strategic formulation is development of an optimal strategy whereby state objectives align feasible policy goals to be executed by military forces. First, for the Air Force it means reinforcing and maintaining its long-standing tradition of excellence in pursuit of traditional airpower missions. Second, it is an impetus to reevaluate the institution's strategic position as a powerful adjunct to the main effort—which will presumably be increasingly attentive to irregular warfare activities. One of the most respected American airpower enthusiasts recognizes the importance of this distinction. Dr. Mark Clodfelter, states that "As long as they [airpower enthusiasts] continue to

[16] Ibid., 32-3.
[17] Ibid., 45.
[18] Ibid., 45.
[19] Ibid., 19.
[20] Michael Handel, *Masters of War,* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), tri-fold, 350-1.
[21] Ibid., 350-1.

rely on airpower to help achieve their objectives in war, American air commanders and their political leaders must acknowledge Clausewitz's realism, not the idealist notions of Mitchell and his successors."[22] Thus, today's war may not require traditional airpower, rather it requires the adoption of a focus on the current and likely future fight.

For the Air Force, the requirement to adapt is obvious: modern war is distinguishing itself from traditional concepts because unconventional forms of violence are relevant and manifest themselves in more nuanced ways than the past. Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 states that "IW is as strategically important as traditional warfare."[23] The most recent joint definition published in February of 2009 states IW is a "a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence and will."[24] The leadership of the Air Force must ask itself if the institution is prepared for these types of enemies. If the institution of the Air Force is to remain relevant, it must be willing to adapt to the prevailing strategic environment. In fact, "any military force that…does not adapt in a time of strategic change will decline in effectiveness."[25] As nations strategically adapt, transformations take place within the components of national power, such as military institutions.[26] Regarding military groups in particular, John Nagl contends senior leadership must buy into institutional changes, fund those enterprises, and sustain them before any meaningful change can take root.[27] Although the Air Force enjoys most strategic relevance and historical success in traditional, major theater warfare scenarios these are not the types of wars America is embroiled. The tools the Air Force used to propel the institution to success must be adapted to the prevailing security environment.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan represent a new set of challenges offering an opportunity to transform the military's of yester-decade into strategically relevant forces today—and with foresight from leadership, well into the future. The leadership of the Air Force must achieve this objective by first understanding and potentially altering the very tendencies that have made the institution successful. Technology, individualism, and progressive airpower theory contain basic levels of merit that must be adapted. The current Chief of Staff of the Air Force recently released "The 21st Century Air Force: Irregular Warfare White Paper" taking giant strides towards redirecting the institution in a way that outlines an irregular warfare vision while addressing contemporary threats. Although not explicitly written, the document acknowledges the difficulties transforming an institution driven by technology, individualism, and dogmatic theories. The following is a list of mutually reinforcing prescriptions that address the Air Force's three tendencies:

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[22] Mark Clodfelter, "A Strategy Based on Faith: The Enduring Appeal of Progressive American Airpower", (Norfolk, Va: JFQ, issue 49, 2nd quarter 2008), 24-31 and 150-60.
[23] DoD Directive 3000.05, "Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations", Nov 2005.
[24] Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)", Version 1.0, Department of Defense, 27 February 2009.
[25] Steven Metz and Douglas Johnson, *Asymmetry and US Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts*, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 7.
[26] Colin Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the Way of American War Adapt?*, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 10.
[27] John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4.

1) To counter a reliance on expensive systems and technology the Air Force should maintain comparative advantages and simultaneously invest in airframes and technical systems our allies can use (by way of training from USAF personnel) in pursuit of IW objectives.

2) To counter individualism the Air Force should view the world through purple lenses. The Air Force is beholden to the missions it supports. Currently, the most pressing national security dilemmas are long-term counter-insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Air Force must realize that IW will continue to be a strategic imperative and ignoring the fact can place the institution in peril.

3) To counter wholesale submission to progressive airpower theory the Air Force should make a real effort not only to re-write doctrine (which it has modestly done with the publication of AFDD 2-3), but also execute the ideas in the field. To simply create new doctrine is not enough. New ideas must be executed in the field in order to assess the effectiveness and make improvements in support of the main effort: ground forces working to build the legitimacy of foreign governments.

The first area of consideration for change is the emphasis given to technology. Irregular warfare has little room for the use of expensive machines designed for theater warfare. America's strategic history reflects a close tie to pragmatic application of technology in order to solve major problems.[28] Thus far the Air Force meets its mandate through the procurement of expensive, technological machines (planes, satellites, and intellectual investment in scientific education and training for operation/training of said technology). Although the service holds a distinct comparative advantage over near peer nations, it is time for a "de-evolution" of technology. Simply put, the Air Force must decouple itself from a reliance on the latest technology. This prescript does not suggest the Air Force should abandon wholesale its main roles or all airframes supporting the achievement of those goals. The suggestion merely proposes the organization deemphasize machines (in terms of resourcing) and reemphasize ideas/training on proven systems and relationships created through interactions at the individual level with allies and partner nations. Not only does a penchant for technological solutions provide inertia to the trend, but those funding the enterprises in Congress also perpetuate expensive weapons programs.

This fact is illustrated by Congress's recent addition of 12 F-22's to Secretary Gate's proposed budget which increased the number of total F-22s from 187 to 199—an increase in cost of 2.8 billion dollars.[29] As a matter of comparison 2.8 billion dollars is what President Obama proposed to give Pakistan in military aid for 2010. Foregoing debate over the efficacy and accountability of giving military aid to Pakistan, it is obvious the money is strategically better spent combating terrorists, insurgents, lawlessness and pursuing our interests in that country (cross-roads radical Islam and nuclear weapons). However, as the actual events maker clear, the US Congress and Air Force show a tendency to spend an enormous amount of money to aggressively develop and exploit technology in pursuit of air, space, and cyberspace dominance.

[28] Bernstein, Alvin, MacGregor Knox, and Williamson Murray, eds., *The Making of Strategy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 345.
[29] Editorial, "We Don't Need the F-22", *New York Times*, 20 June 2009, page 18.

Regardless, possessing the most technologically advanced systems no longer equates to achievement of national security. During a recent speaking engagement at the National Defense University Secretary Gates urged the services to balance the pursuit of technology with current demands. Furthermore, he said the military should look for a "75% solution," with an emphasis on less technology.[30] Additionally, owning expensive systems saps the budget that is already becoming more constrained. Services are being forced to optimize investments for maximum return. In an effort to seek value-maximizing strategy, services are turning to concepts such as building partnership capacity. Therefore, a more attractive investment for the Air Force may well be geared towards "lesser" forms of technology that we can use to train our allies to employ in pursuit of internal stability which will, in turn, propagate across its borders. In short, deemphasizing and redirecting the resources used in pursuit of technology will facilitate future Air Force success.

As pointed out above, the United States must rely on partner nations to achieve our national security objectives. The US military cannot be everywhere all the time. In other words, the public good of international security must not be shouldered by the US alone. Instead, partner nations will increasingly be called upon to provide their own security within their borders. Although the Air Force has made efforts to build a nascent Air Force capability in Iraq and Afghanistan the efforts are ad hoc. Based on the success of one squadron within Air Force Special Operations Command, the 6th Special Operations Squadron (merely 150-200 people), it is possible to see how an organization can bolster partner nations' air forces.

The 6th SOS uses small, non-standard and foreign aircraft to instruct foreign air force's in basic airmanship. The extremely small organization uses low-tech methods to build capability in partner nations. The key to the squadron is the fact their deployments build confidence, inspire trust, and transfer basic airmanship skills to allies. What sets these deployments apart from a normal Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) deployment? The deployments are focused on training and building the capacity of indigenous populations with the technology they can afford. First, the interaction between AFSOC advisors and partner units occur at the individual level. Face-to-face interactions inspire trust and confidence. Second, many of our allies cannot afford fighter jets, but instead rely on prop planes and utility aircraft for the critical missions of air mobility, light strike, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR). Even as the 6th Special Operations Squadron provides two hundred or so advisors, the larger Air Force has no dedicated organization to carry out this function. However, debate has raged within the Air Force on how to cope with the emerging mission of the "Air Advisor". The Air Force is widely expected to develop and implement a large organizational change after top generals adjourn from the CORONA conference.[31] The Air Force officials will also likely discuss how to inculcate the advisor mindset and indirect approach that is necessary to perpetuate the mission of building partnership capacity (BPC).

Another area of change for the Air Force is the requirement to become a more joint player. This fact actually goes hand in hand with the third prescript that the Air Force must execute changes in doctrine in the field. This must be done in order to build an institutional memory of how the

[30] Barnes, Julian, "Gates Says Force, High Technology Have Their Limits", *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 2008, 10.
[31] *Inside the Pentagon*, "Service's Top IW officials briefed", 21 May 2009.

service supports Irregular Warfare. Irregular warfare is a joint, combined, and interagency intensive environment—something everyone in DOD is coming to grips with. The focus on becoming more joint is where the CSAF is expending much effort. The 2010 budget submitted by the Air Force requested one billion dollars less than last year's budget, less new airframes, and less upgrades and new programs across the organization. In this case, less *is* more. The major addition is the procurement of new Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (MQ-9 Reapers)—a much welcomed focus by the joint community. In fact, the service finance chief, Major General Larry Spencer said, "The Air Force is really focused on being part of the joint war fight…Everything we do is devoted to supporting the combatant commanders."[32] In keeping with support to combatant commanders is less emphasis on progressive airpower theories and more focus on what joint and coalition partners desire in terms of capabilities from the Air Force.

Because the Air Force is making an effort to change the culture towards supporting joint partners, it lessens the parochial nature of service view-points and progressive airpower theory's credibility vis-à-vis the strategic debate. The service must retain strengths of the institution (space and air superiority) while at the same time strike a balance with the capabilities needed to support joint and coalition partners. Although the direct application of airpower is a hallmark of US military dominance, the service must harness the indirect potential of airpower. Currently the Air Force transfers large sums of money for low numbers of aircraft, missiles, or satellites. An alternative approach could hedge some of the resourcing for the development of partner nation capacity. Some airpower-centric BPC efforts at the lowest level could include: development of aerospace infrastructure, improvement of safety of flight (increased maintenance), standardization of airfields, professionalization of the host nation force, and increasing security assistance / foreign military sales. In congruence with comprehensive efforts (political, economic or otherwise) the goal of BPC is to connect far-flung populations to government power (and hopefully build legitimacy). In theory, this approach is more cost effective in terms of dollar value, time, and personnel. It is imperative the Air Force embrace the indirect approach.

Will the Air Force Adapt?

The prevailing security environment is making abundantly clear traditional scenarios of conflict are becoming less and less likely. Instead, a hybrid form of warfare characterized by irregular, ambiguous enemies who operate within populations will be a keystone of future warfare. If the United States Air Force is to remain relevant, it must find a way to resolve the tension, by meeting the needs of conventional and unconventional warfare. Truth be told the CSAF agrees: "the Air Force must balance the requirements levied upon airpower in IW with the concurrent need to maintain decisive advantage in conventional warfare."[33] The defining hallmarks of Air Force culture "determine whether the organization is able to learn and adapt through critical assessment and experimentation with and application of new ideas and technologies."[34] But does the answer lie in adapting technology or ideas to address emerging challenges? There are elements of both in a successful solution, although actionable ideas are arguably more difficult to

[32] William Matthews, "USAF Budget Request Stresses Jointness", *Defense News*, 7 May 2009.
[33] Michael B. Donley and General Norton Schwartz. "The 21st Century Air Force: Irregular Warfare White Paper", Jan 2009.
[34] Siegl, 106.

realize. Regardless, the Air Force way of doing business must be reconciled with current security dilemmas.

Three factors defining Air Force culture—a rabid lust for technology, the cult of individuality, and divine belief in the ability of airpower—are engines of success that may cause failure. In fact, the factors facilitate the Air Force's institutional success while simultaneously limiting its ability to adapt to irregular warfare. Because of this fact it will be difficult to regress to less technical, organizationally broad-minded, and supporting roles. What makes transformation difficult is that the Air Force strategy must be institutionalized in order to be perpetuated. The same people composing the organization will be required to change long held, fundamental beliefs. Simply put, the Air Force's institutional inertia will be hard to change. However difficult this may be, all is not lost for there is hope.

Years ago in 1982 a provocative piece titled "Where Have All the Mitchell's Gone?" by Lt Col Kline was published in the *Air University Review* (what has become the *Air and Space Power Journal*). In it, the author argues the culture of the Air Force shuns the same values espoused by Billy Mitchell: going against the grain. Kline urges that "It is reassuring to a budding generation of military-aviation specialists that things of the spirit can transcend career considerations—that nation and honor supersede the narrower traits of group conformity and safety which mark the serviceman's routine". Mitchell was a man of character and honor who was court-martialed for his beliefs. Court-martial is not necessary today, but creative and antithetical ideas are needed in today's Air Force. Although the institution is heavily reliant on advanced technology, individualism, and progressive airpower theory for its success, are these characteristics needed in their current form? What defines a balanced, successful Air Force strategy and how will it be institutionalized? Most importantly, who are today's Mitchells that will lead this change?

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