

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

TARGETING THE HUMAN DOMAIN:  
REACHING INTERNAL, JOINT, AND ADVERSARIAL  
AUDIENCES

by

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## **Biography**

Lt Col Mary Stewart is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. Prior to this assignment, she served as the Commander, 86th Medical Support Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, Germany. In this capacity, she commanded a 197-person unit providing health care support services to Ramstein Air Base and throughout the Kaiserslautern Military Community and its Geographically Separated Units. She ensured managed care support for 57,000 beneficiaries with an annual budget of \$18 million. She commanded the Department of Defense's busiest Patient Movement Items Center, the Air Force's second largest Patient Movement Office, USAFE's largest Medical War Reserve Materiel program, and was responsible for the operational readiness of more than 850 medics. Lieutenant Colonel Stewart graduated and was commissioned from the United States Air Force Academy in 1999 with a Bachelor of Science in Management. Lieutenant Colonel Stewart has held a variety of positions at the clinic, hospital, Air Staff, and FOA levels.

## Abstract

“Airmen, embodied with the global perspective natural to the speed and range of airpower, have much to contribute through leadership at the highest levels of joint command.”<sup>1</sup> This quote comes from the Air Force’s Current Chief of Staff, General Goldfein, in his second focus area paper. The spirit of this line is exactly what the Air Force needs to embrace. It maintains the forward-thinking momentum for which the Air Force is known while repositioning the service in the center of the joint fight. Unfortunately, too seldom do we see this enthusiasm displayed by other senior leaders, nor correspondingly within Air Force units. We are far more comfortable offering that perspective from 30,000 feet above the globe, and instead of using that vantage point to add to an already robust discussion, our tendency is to ignore the other views below our own narrowly scoped requirements. The Air Force must take a step back and reevaluate both our strategic communications and strategic planning to ensure we are fully embracing our strengths, but also admitting our weaknesses, using both reflections to maximize our commitment and contribution to the joint fight. Ultimately, this research paper uses a qualitative approach to argue that the Air Force is best served by accepting its cultural and historic role as the single most critical joint force enabler—one which understands and capitalizes on the human domain of warfare, rather than a service singularly focused on creating an independent joint fighting identity as the central warfighter. An Air Force which welcomes its role as a global and ubiquitous force operating not only across the full range of operations but which is also able to address the nuances of the human topography—of the adversary, partners and internally, is an unstoppable force for good.

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<sup>1</sup> Headquarters, USAF, “CSAF Focus Area: Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams,” Oct 2016, available on [www.af.mil/AboutUs/AirForceSeniorLeaders/CSAF.aspx](http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/AirForceSeniorLeaders/CSAF.aspx).



## Introduction

In the words of strategist Colin Gray, “paradoxically and ironically, airpower’s most forceful advocates, from the time of Billy Mitchell to the present, also have served as its worst enemies.”<sup>2</sup> The Air Force is a service which fought for its existence and separation from the Army and has spent nearly every moment since then asking for forgiveness for not being—and thinking like—a land force. We spend far too much time finding ways to justify ourselves rather than embracing what we bring to the fight. We can’t lead JTFs or C2 ops without changing our apologetic rhetoric. Furthermore, the Air Force still has a long way to go in achieving the global perspective General Goldfein seeks for his Airmen. We are far more comfortable offering that perspective from 30,000 feet above the globe, and instead of using that vantage point to add to an already robust discussion, our tendency is to ignore the other views below our own more narrowly scoped requirements. The Air Force must take a step back and reevaluate our strategies to ensure we are fully embracing our strengths, but also admitting our weaknesses, using both reflections to maximize our commitment and contribution to the joint fight. The Air Force is best served by accepting its cultural and historic role as the single most critical joint force enabler—one which understands and capitalizes on the human domain of warfare, rather than a service singularly focused on creating an independent joint fighting identity as the central warfighter. An Air Force which welcomes its role as a global and ubiquitous force operating not only across the full range of operations but which is also able to address the nuances of the human topography—of the adversary, partners and internally, is an unstoppable force for good.

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<sup>2</sup> Gray, Colin. “Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2008, p. 43.

Historically, the Air Force's cultural characteristics are exactly what are needed for the joint force of the future, given the global complexities we face. We are agile, innovative and independent thinkers. Ironically, we are also intensely insecure about these attributes, consistently downplaying our role in the joint fight. Assuredly, we are often the supporting cast, but we are in every single frame of the movie. There is no other component who is as engaged in the overall fight. We are the service who has most consistently been engaged in combat over the past 25 years; we are the service who brings everyone to the fight and then brings them home. We are first in and last out in almost every instance, whether that's a C-17, an ISR image, or a kinetic cyber effect. We repeatedly break ground like it is commonplace, and yet we turn some of our strongest skills into markers for insecurity. We need to embrace the ability to kinetically operate from a chair in Nevada or North Dakota. We must welcome our inherent distrust of doctrine. It simply does not move at the speed and range of airpower.

However, the Air Force cannot emphasize its strengths without also admitting its vulnerabilities, particularly in regards to leading the joint force. Simply put, the Air Force has not succeeded in understanding human geography. Our emphasis on the constantly emerging and expanding space and cyber domains has come at the expense of remembering the human domain that is fundamental to warfare. We must get better at understanding the humanity of war if we wish to succeed as joint leaders.

### **JOINT STRATEGIES' COMPARISON: UNDERSTANDING HUMANITY OF WAR**

Prior to 2001, the Department of Defense did not emphasize language, regional, and cultural (LRC) competencies for its uniformed professionals.<sup>3</sup> Following the start of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, the Department began placing increased emphasis on

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Sands, "Assessing Special Operations Forces Language, Regional and Culture Needs," (JSOU Report 16-8: MacDill AFB, 2016), p 1.

these skill sets, codified first in the 2005 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap and most recently addressed again in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)<sup>4</sup>. Specific to the QDR, the emphasis is placed on the military's ability to build partnership capacities. Across the Services, the success of increasing LRC skillsets depends on a variety of factors. (Assuredly, the success within each service also varies, with Special Operations Forces and those closely identified with them commonly receiving the most training and attention in this area.) Where the Services differ in regards to intent, implementation and interests, however, is also quite telling of how each service has determined its own identity, and is often expressly linked to the domain(s) upon which each operates.

In May 2015, the Air Force published a Strategic Master Plan, with a corresponding Future Operating Concept that followed in September of the same year. Combined, these documents set out to align the Air Force's "strategy, policy and guidance with planning and programmatic decisions of senior Air Force leadership in support of National Defense and Combatant Command requirements."<sup>5</sup> These documents represent the Holy Grail of the Air Force's planning efforts, and as such, should define relationships internal to the Service; with its joint and international partners; and against the enemies of the United States. For the purposes of this paper, the Air Force strategic planning document was compared and contrasted with similar strategic planning documents from the US Navy, Marine Corps and Army to see how consistent the military's messaging and priorities are in relation to its common enemies, fought via joint platforms. By determining how each Service views itself, one can begin to address how each addresses its interactions on the human domain and as part of the joint fight.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense. Quadrennial Defense Review, Washington, D.C., March 2014.

<sup>5</sup> USAF Strategic Master Plan, May 2015; available on [www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil), p 3.

The Navy published the 10-page “A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority” in January 2016. The latest strategic planning guidance available publically at the time this paper was written for the US Army was from 2014, a 30-page document entitled “Army Strategic Planning Guidance,” and the Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025 was released in 2015 and is 42 pages long. By contrast, the Air Force’s two planning documents are 113-pages in length when combined. All documents were reviewed for language specific to each service’s support of the homeland, as well as for verbiage that discussed each service’s role in defending against and/or defeating enemies of the United States. These two categories of reference were used as substitutes for each service’s definitions of place and personhood, respectively. The homeland generically crosscuts all Services in regards to the place with which each identifies; discussions of the enemy people provide a means with which to contrast each service’s own definitions of self, or their personhood. Additionally, all documents were also reviewed for references to culture, both internal Service culture as well as cultural training and engagement requirements.

#### **Homeland References:**

For the purposes of simplicity, the documents were reviewed specifically for references of support *for* or *to* America (or the Nation), as an object of each service’s purpose and actions. The Army and Marines relied most heavily on this technique to unite their servicemen and women behind a single cause or place, with at least 51 references to America in the Army document and 42 in the Marine document. The Air Force and Navy both referenced this support of the homeland 10 times, though keeping in mind the length of each service’s plans, the Air Force was much more reluctant to refer back to Place as a unifying attribute for its Airmen.

### **Enemy References:**

For similar purposes, the documents were reviewed specifically for references to the following key words and phrases: enemy, adversary, defend/defense, competitor, and the CRIKT adversaries—China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Terrorism. Of note, all of the Services except for the Air Force called out at least one enemy specifically by name, with the Army doing so most often, including five separate references to North Korea. By contrast, the Air Force was the most common user of the generic synonyms for US adversaries, with at least 99 references. The hope is that these generic terms were purposefully added by the strategic plan writers, acknowledging the USAF's broad role and myriad engagements. Given the extent of Air Force interactions worldwide, it would be impossible to single out enemies in the same way other forces may be able to do so. The Army referenced enemies and its associated phrases 58 times, the Marines 43 times, and the Navy 16 times. However, again, in reference to the total length of each document, the Air Force actually referred to adversarial People less than once per page, while each of the other Services had at least one per page, on average, with the Army and Navy closer to two per page.

### **Cultural References:**

Finally, each strategic planning document was reviewed for both internal and external references to culture, with the Air Force far exceeding the other Service references in this regard, with a total of 27 mentions, as compared to nine for the Marines, six for the Army and one for the Navy. But how the Services used the phrasing is especially important to this part of the document review. As examples, the Marine references to culture are very specific, either to their own cultural identity: “define the cultural identity of Marines in the most basic terms—they

express what we believe...Every Marine a Rifleman”<sup>6</sup>; or to their enemy: “We will go to greater lengths to understand our enemies and the range of cultural, societal, and political factors affecting all with whom we interact.”<sup>7</sup> Many of the Air Force’s numerous references do address the need for cross-cultural competency; however at times, the realities of this challenge proved disheartening in context: “We must train and equip Airmen to conduct effective multi-domain ISR anywhere in the world in all domains and operating environments, even if we lack full knowledge of the cultural...specifics of every potential adversary we may face.”<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, it is the assessment of this author that the Air Force focused on culture as a buzzword vice a defined strategic imperative.

#### **DEFINING IDENTITY: PRECURSOR TO OPERATING ON THE HUMAN DOMAIN**

Defining our humanity is an age-old debate; indeed, the very debate may be what does make us human.<sup>9</sup> There are innumerable facets and options that shape our identities, both independently and as part of a collective. Specific to this discussion, US military service identity is commonly considered an attained status, one that is earned based on actions vice ascribed rights. However, the ties that bind a Service upon acceptance can, at least in part, be defined by the Place in which one serves, be in ties to the nation or to the domains or career fields in which one operates. Clearly, the Place does not have to exist within physical borders; it can be viewed more as an idea than a location. In the US armed forces, Place is often defined by members of the military as the idea of what people are willing to fight and die to defend.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025, available on [www.usmc.mil](http://www.usmc.mil), 2015, p 7.

<sup>7</sup> Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025, available on [www.usmc.mil](http://www.usmc.mil), 2015, p 7.

<sup>8</sup> USAF Strategic Master Plan, May 2015; available on [www.af.mil](http://www.af.mil), p 41.

<sup>9</sup> Air War College, Tribal and Traditional Cultures Class Lecture, 26 Aug 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Air War College, Tribal and Traditional Cultures Lecture, 31 Aug 2016.

This connection to the homeland is closely linked with Service identities of Personhood as well, a people's connection to the land as part of themselves. In many ways, military servicemen and women are part of a communal culture, their own tribe of sorts, separate from the American population at large, with its own rituals and religion, illustrated via such military-specific rites as the Uniformed Code of Military Justice as a moral compass. This holds for smaller groupings within a service, as well as for larger joint and international allied warfighting. Correspondingly, service history, rhetoric and literature must focus energy on defining these Places and Personhood concepts to its membership.

Specific to the Air Force, leadership at all levels must understand and be able to educate subordinates on unifying themes of Air Force identity; in short, to instill institutional memory and history. By doing so, the Air Force will be better able to ensure comprehension of the human domain of warfare, as it relates to self and adversaries. This is especially important for a service which so often operates on the peripherals of humanity, thereby potentially resulting in dangerous actions and priorities internally, and a failure to explain its own reasons for existence externally.

Fundamentally, the Air Force has a tendency to overstate the importance of technologically advanced war-fighting--removed from the front lines--as the safest and most effective technique.<sup>11</sup> This is potentially catastrophic if, and when, the US military is again engaged in low-end conflicts of the future, where the simpler solution may be better than the more complex options given the often less robust environment in which operations will be occurring.

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<sup>11</sup> Deptulva, David. "Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Roles and Missions of the Armed Services in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Mitchell Institute Policy Papers*, vol 1, Mar 2016, p 8.

Service identity is defined in large part by how—and the places from which—it faces combat, and that identity defines how a Service engages the enemy and the emphasis placed on understanding culture. The Air Force’s lack of a singularly identifying commonality across all Airmen—be it personhood, place, or any other unifying factor--has a tremendous impact on how it identifies with and relates to its adversaries, as well as to its civilian leadership. As a result, the Air Force struggles more than the other services to fully incorporate cultural understanding and human domain operations. The human domain has become the vernacular for a sixth warfighting front, in addition to the more commonly recognized air, space, cyberspace, land, and sea domains. It is this place that crosscuts the other domains and engages both the US militaries and its adversaries, and it is in this space where LRC is most likely to impact mission success. Additionally, as evidenced by the Air Force Strategic Planning documents and multiple senior leader testimonies to Congress and speaking engagement transcripts, the Air Force sometimes has difficulty explaining its own “why” to both internal and external audiences. Furthermore, this lack of a grounding focus directly impacts how the Air Force chooses its priorities and organizes its capabilities.

At the 2015 Air and Space Conference, then Secretary of the Air Force Deborah James gave a speech entitled, “Reinventing the Aerospace Nation.” This discourse addressed the need for both Airmen and military industrial leaders to speak from a singular agenda and purpose, to create “a community of air-minded people around the globe.”<sup>12</sup> The speech evoked historic and cultural references, hearkened back to the Golden Age of Aviation, and seamlessly weaved these poetic undercurrents with the technological trends and imperatives of today. This speech began

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah James, “Reinventing the Aerospace Nation,” Keynote address, 2015 Air and Space Conference, 14 Sep 2015.

to tell the Air Force story in a way that demonstrated how the Air Force contributes to the homeland and in defeating US adversaries and created a place for Airmen to call home.

Other senior leader engagement transcripts found from 2015 and 2016 make no mention of this aerospace nation. In fact, none of the speeches or testimonies reviewed to date seem to have a consistent theme or message beyond continuing budget woes that impact readiness, particularly when compared across different senior leaders. Most of the addresses do make a concerted effort to address enemy capabilities; however, they tend to do so in a national sense, vice specific to how the Air Force can counter them. A further website review was done on the topics available in 2016 to units for commanders' calls; a new topic is released each week. None focused on enemy capabilities or culture, or on the Air Force's identifying culture. How powerful would it be if on a given week every squadron commander—pilots, comptrollers, medics, maintainers—all used the exact same talking points to explain the value the USAF had in a particular joint engagement—be it a historic battle or a contemporary action...if every Airman was given a common identifying pride vice the stove-piped views on which we too often tend to focus? While it is critical for all senior leaders to tell the same unifying story, it is far more potent once those talking points are ingrained as beliefs that permeate the entire organization.

While every document reviewed has completely valid points, focused rhetoric on budget criticisms and readiness concerns do not inspire Airmen, nor do they motivate Congress to fund the Air Force without more concrete examples of how the Air Force can defeat US enemies. Furthermore, not capitalizing on creating a shared space for Airmen, like the idea of an aerospace nation does, is a failure on the part of the Air Force to create a uniting personal identity and a place from which to operate within the human domain.

Taking a specific and recent Air Force publication as an example, the Air Force Future Operating Concept (AFFOC) does not adequately address the future warfighting environment, as defined by the Joint Staff. It is evident the Air Force did not spend much time planning for those aspects of warfare that focus on the lower end of conflict, preferring instead to emphasize technological advancements and how to capitalize on the use of emerging domains at the higher end of the warfighting spectrum. Understandably, these areas are well within the Air Force's comfort zone and likely the ways in which the Air Force can, in fact, best contribute to the fight.

The central tenet of the AFFOC, operational agility, is a promising addition to the document; operational agility is defined as the "ability to act appropriately within a changing context"<sup>13</sup>. This tenet is absolutely required to meet the challenges facing the DOD in the future, broadly defined in the AFFOC as globally contested norms and persistent disorder.<sup>1415</sup> Additionally, the concept of operational agility provides significant leeway to the Air Force to adapt core missions and future requirements to meet a variety of rising threats. Unfortunately, the remainder of the AFFOC predominantly focuses on expanding the traditional roles of the Air Force into the space and cyber domains and, in general, leaves out any significant discussion on those aspects of warfare that fall squarely within the human domain. An Air Force that wants to grow its leadership potential and opportunities in the joint environment has to be able to contribute to all manners of joint warfare and operate directly within the context of humanity as well as above it.

Not every scenario can be accounted for in a general document such as the AFFOC; however, one must wonder whether less technologically reliant examples were considered, given

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<sup>13</sup> Headquarters U.S. Air Force. *USAF Future Operating Concept*. Washington DC, 2015, p 7.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense. *Joint Operating Environment for 2035*. Washington DC, 2016, p 3.

the propensity in the Air Force to focus on how to fix things from a scientifically-generated perspective. The human geography of war is often a side note in Air Force doctrine and planning. Even within the current conflicts, the Air Force has repeatedly, and in an almost prideful manner, described its use of high-end tools to fight a low-end enemy.<sup>16</sup> The AFFOC would have been stronger from a joint perspective if it acknowledged that low-end conflicts are not only inevitable, but likely to grow in future years, and directly addressed ways in which the Air Force can add to the joint fight in these arenas.

### **“The Oxygen the Joint Force Breathes”<sup>17</sup>**

There is no way for any one member of a military force to act individually and succeed; the essence of mission success relies on members across various platforms, domains, and even nations acting as a single entity. As a result of these complex interactions that crisscross multiple fronts, two of the best ways for a service to define its own identity are by (1) comparing itself with the partners with which it fights wars and (2) contrasting itself with the adversaries it faces. Neither of these methods however are valuable if the service does not first understand how it’s viewed by its own members.

General Goldfein has previously described airpower as the oxygen the joint force breathes—absolutely critical, but often taken as a given. By comparison, while national and DOD expectations are that the other Services will win against an enemy, it is rarely assumed it will simply be done effortlessly. The Air Force can absolutely capitalize on this oxygen analogy to illustrate the absolute criticality and dependence the other components have on the US Air Force. We can also use it to remind ourselves of the universal power and influence wielded by

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<sup>16</sup> Warfighting Seminar Discussion 6501 #4, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 13 Dec 16.

<sup>17</sup> Headquarters US Air Force. CSAF Letter to Airmen, “Squadrons...The Beating Heart of the Air Force.” Aug 2016.

the Air Force, generating internal pride in our contributions across all platforms and enablers. Furthermore, we can use this analogy to remind our enemies of what it means to be deprived of this life-sustaining requirement.

One of Sun Tzu's most famous tenets was to know thy self, know thy enemy. Services who are best able to define these interrelationships most closely identify as a single identity. In many cases, however, this self-awareness does not occur, and the organization suffers for it. The Air Force has the opportunity to strengthen its messaging to adversaries—and as a result also reach and unify its internal audience simultaneously. By understanding the enemy, we can capitalize on what needs to be done to ensure its defeat. And in order to understand the enemy, we must focus on its humanity as well as our own. Very few organizations are as essentially human as the military, given its requirements to engage with so many elements of humanity, from “balanc[ing] security with government coordination, confronting aggressors and the complexities of human societies” globally, and requiring innovative and adaptive learners able to deal with the nuances of human uncertainty.<sup>18</sup> The remainder of this paper uses the phases of targeting to recommend how the Air Force can improve its human engagements to internal audiences (Phase 1), among the joint force (Phase 2), and to better pursue our adversaries (Phase 3).

## **TARGETING THE HUMAN DOMAIN**

### **Targeting Phase 1--The End State and Commander's Objectives (Internal Audiences):**

Acknowledging that human behavior does not fit within physical boundaries, those interactions between the military and its adversaries cannot function cleanly within any one of

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<sup>18</sup> Ben Zweibelson, “Thinking Beyond the Books,” (Air and Space Power Journal, Summer 2016, v30), p 32.

the pre-existing domains.<sup>19</sup> This concept is most easily understood by those servicemen and women who engage directly with the other cultures with which we are at war. Soldiers deployed onto a Forward Operating Base within Afghanistan, sailors on the USS Comfort offering humanitarian aid across South America, and Airmen instructing allies on C2 capabilities within an AOC have a defined purpose that forces human interaction. As a result, there is a clear reason for each of these groups to understand the people with whom they are dealing.

Conversely, the human domain can be a more complicated task for some Airmen to both understand and embrace, given our historic warfighting methods. Often, the Air Force fights from its home station, beneath the ground in a missile silo, or from a Remotely Piloted Aircraft trailer. When the Air Force assuredly participates in direct engagements in hostile territory, it commonly does so from far above the battlefield; via a space satellite feed; or from a computer keyboard. This reliance on technology generates immense capability for the Nation, but it can also alienate Airmen from the humanities of war. This is certainly not the case for all Airmen; many have deployed “boots on ground” for both combat and humanitarian causes around the world, much like their brothers and sisters-in-arms in the Army, Navy and Marines. However, the biggest differential for the Air Force is that the Airmen who are isolated from this direct engagement are most often the operators, the ones who wage the actual warfare, and the ones who ultimately command and lead the Air Force at the highest levels.

Furthermore, the Air Force prides itself first and foremost on technology, as this scientific skillset cross-cuts all three of its common warfighting domains: air, space and cyberspace. However, it does not lend the service anything concrete on which to ground its identity. Technology exists as a capability, not as a person or place, two of the most common

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Sands, “Assessing Special Operations Forces Language, Regional and Culture Needs,” (JSOU Report 16-8: MacDill AFB, 2016), p 4.

ways in which humans relate and congregate as a united group. As such, the Air Force often struggles to create a single identity for Airmen to embrace. Pilots are pilots first, Airmen second in the Air Force. One need only look at the uniforms worn. When the Air Force wants to emphasize the importance of a career field, it allows that Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) to wear a utility uniform meant for those actively engaged in the act of flying, the flight suit. Space and missileers now have this privilege, with continuing discussion on adding cyber operators to this esteemed grouping. The same is true of the AFSC badges worn—wings are now worn by operators in the air, space and cyber domains. Contrast this philosophy with that of another Service: a Marine identifies as a Marine first, and any mission set second. One seldom, if ever, meets a Marine who answers what he does for a living with anything other than “I am a US Marine.”

General Goldfein has identified three primary talking points which center each of his engagements: teaching Airmen to lead in joint environments, revitalizing the squadrons, and ensuring command and control is done properly for the combatant commander.<sup>20</sup> In each of these strategic imperatives, the Air Force has an opportunity to more fully embrace the dynamics of the human domain. Certainly, in order to create joint leaders, the Air Force will have to better comprehend the human contexts of war, as the other Services are currently ahead of the Air Force in this capability. By revitalizing the squadron as the “heartbeat of the Air Force,” the Air Force also creates an opportunity to more fully embrace its own cultural humanity, albeit at the unit level vice Service level.<sup>21</sup> Finally, given the unprecedented amount of data flowing through C2 platforms, in order to ensure joint fighters have the best information possible for decision-making, understanding the human complexities on the battlefield is imperative. These emphasis

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<sup>20</sup> General David Goldfein, CSAF. 2016 Air and Space Conference Remarks, 20 Sep 2016.

<sup>21</sup> General David Goldfein, CSAF. 2016 Air and Space Conference Remarks, 20 Sep 2016.

areas may be the impetus the Air Force needs to redefine its warfighting frontiers, using place and personhood as proxies for its identity. In other words, the underpinnings of the new CSAF priorities may provide the right tools to best target the human domain. However, if this is to be the case, the message as these emphasis areas are further fleshed out must be synchronized and clear to all levels of the organization.

As it stands today, the Air Force is caught up in a set of dichotomies. Our boundlessness leads to placelessness, or no concrete location on which to rest our values and priorities. Our individualistic start to an operator's career challenges the group dynamics required to lead later. Of late, we have used our intellect and technology to restrict rather than to explore limitlessness in operations, with the mounting costs needed to generate new systems essentially grounding us. In Gray's article discussing the fallacies of airpower, he points out that airmen often mistake doctrine for a manifesto, ultimately overreaching and overextending the service beyond what is actually feasible to achieve.<sup>22</sup> Recent policies have de-emphasized risk-taking and focused more on strict adherence to rules. Air Force Instructions have devolved from a general methodology to rigid requirements and used by many in the service to limit, rather than encourage, creative risk-tasking.

### **Targeting Phase 2—Target Development and Prioritization (Joint Audiences):**

The Joint Operating Environment (JOE) 2035 identifies six different anticipated contexts for future warfare: Violent Ideological Competition, Threatened US Territory and Sovereignty, Antagonistic Geopolitical Balancing, Disrupted Global Commons, A Contest for Cyberspace, and Shattered and Reordered Regions.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the Air Force describes the 2030

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<sup>22</sup> Gray, Colin. "Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies." *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2008, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Defense. *Joint Operating Environment for 2035*. Washington DC, 2016, p. iv.

operational environment as comprised of two main vectors: “traditional threat systems” and “comprehensive capabilities with a less predictable impact.”<sup>24</sup> Both vectors are further described in terms of technological abilities and threats exclusively from air, space and cyberspace, focused on threats in a non-permissive environment. While this particular Air Force document is specific to Air Superiority requirements, other Air Force strategic guidance also ignores the human components for the most part. In July 2014, “America’s Air Force: A Call to the Future” was published, describing four emerging trends globally: (1) rapidly emerging technological breakthroughs; (2) geopolitical instability; (3) wide range of operating environments; and (4) increasing importance and vulnerability of the global commons.<sup>25</sup> There is no doubt that all of the trends and threats identified by the Air Force are valid and imperative for national security. It is merely a matter of how the priorities play within the joint force and how the Air Force sells its contributions in the context of joint leadership. Should peer competition be the 2030 focus, or is asymmetric warfare the most likely tactic for the foreseeable future from countries like Iran, North Korea, China and terrorist organizations<sup>26</sup>? More importantly, what is the rest of the joint force emphasizing? Should we be in sync with them; and if not, we should clearly articulate why the Air Force chooses to break form and the value added from doing so.

As a single illustrative point of the above, this paper will highlight one of the six JOE contexts—one that admittedly focuses heavily on the human domain—Shattered and Reordered Regions. The overarching and constantly evolving mission for the US military within the Shattered and Reordered Regions context will be to shape the environment, ideally from a distance, emphasizing the US ability to project Global Influence. Depending on the severity of

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<sup>24</sup> Headquarters USAF. *Air Superiority 2030 Flight Plan: Enterprise Capability Collaboration Team*. Washington DC, 2016, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Defense. *America’s Air Force: A Call to the Future*. Washington DC, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Howard, Russell. *Strategic Culture*. Joint Special Operations University: December 2013, p. 85.

the situation and the implications regionally or internationally, the military must also be prepared to conduct Noncombatant Evacuations—most notably for US citizens, and provide Foreign Humanitarian Assistance.<sup>27</sup> This assistance may run the gamut of operations, including refugee movement and management; monitoring social media impacts, utilizing cyber tools; or mitigating the impacts of more traditional tactics of warfare used within the conflict.

The greatest imperative for the joint force, and an area in which the Air Force must improve its awareness, lies in understanding the ideology and culture that spurs weak and failing states—and the disenfranchised groups within them—to action. How quickly one society or grouping escalates to combative action depends on the people involved and how they view humanity. Is their culture aggressive or passive? Are its people optimistic or pessimistic? What prior experiences do they bring to this new circumstance, and how does this impact their world view? How much power do they think they have—can they win against an enemy? What constitutes victory in their view? What is their warrior ethos? The service best able to answer these questions stands the best chance of making the right decisions to avoid or minimize conflict escalation.

General Goldfein’s third priority, improving command and control for the combatant commanders, may hold the solution for this conundrum. As Dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, retired Lieutenant General Deptula describes the “combat cloud—an operating paradigm where information, data management, connectivity, and command and control are core mission priorities.”<sup>28</sup> Improved C2 operations will enable to Air Force to gather and evaluate the human dynamics on the front lines, a critical capability for the joint fight.

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p 43.

<sup>28</sup> Deptula, David. “Evolving Technologies and Warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Introducing the ‘Combat Cloud’.” *Mitchell Institute Policy Papers*, September 2016, vol 4. p. 1.

### **Targeting Phase 3—Capabilities Analysis (Adversarial Audiences):**

British doctrine has defined understanding an adversary as contextual, imperfect, competitive, and perishable.<sup>29</sup> In other words, understanding is mobile, dynamic and must be continually reviewed and adjusted. Daesh is not Al Qaeda; is not the Syrian government; is not Iranian influence. It is all of the above, none of the above, and constantly shifting in its nature to survive and remain relevant. As a result, those who seek to destroy it must be adaptive as well and focus on six principles of understanding: self-awareness, critical analysis, creative thinking, continuity, collaboration, and fusion.<sup>30</sup> The AFFOC tenet of operational agility is well-suited to address similar themes and capabilities and fill this gap in current DOD doctrine on the human domain.

As an example, the first of these principles is critical for the United States and any other enemies of Daesh; by not fully understanding one's own motivations in relation to its opponent's actions, an adversary cannot expect to be able to comprehend the other side's countermoves. Another common trap nations can fall into is neglecting the need for continuity in our information-seeking. The United States and other nations often have a tendency to simplify matters, and what's unfortunately more problematic, to do so via its own world lens. By seeking a rationalized, etic view, an opponent cannot hope to be able to comprehend the deeper reasoning of its adversary, much less realize they must constantly flex to ensure they retain the most current information. Actions beget actions, and tweak motivations.

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<sup>29</sup> Joint Doctrine Publication 04: Understanding, Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Development, Concepts and Doctrine), Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom, December 2010, p. 2-8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 2-9.

The US Joint Staff has recognized the need to better understand the will of its enemies, as well as the material capabilities it has traditionally focused on destroying.<sup>31</sup> Its current draft concept on the Human Component of Military Operations acknowledges that “warfare in the future will remain an inherently political and human endeavor...People will continue to fight for ‘fear, honor and interests’ as described by the Greek historian Thucydides nearly 2,500 years ago.”<sup>32</sup> In order to understand these most human of motivations, the draft document addresses five elements of comprehension: social, cultural, physical, informational and psychological.<sup>33</sup> Further, the draft document recommends these elements be considered through a temporal lens that allows for continuity of information and flexible adaptation over time as the United States and its adversaries interact and the dynamics inevitably shift. Again, this is an ideal place for the Air Force to inject its C4ISR expertise into how the joint force engages on the human domain.

#### **TARGETING PHASES 4-6:**

“Societies regularly at war...tend to converge in their techniques and values of war, partly from military necessity and partly from mutual self-interest.”<sup>34</sup> A military most willing to understand the cultures of our enemies are best equipped to confront this challenge. Early global engagements must focus on building bridges, creating relationships that inform and enable future influencing capabilities.<sup>35</sup> By creating a “cognitive revolution” within the Air Force, we will be able to stand ready to increase and use our cultural knowledge and skills to fight the best fight.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Draft Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations, Joint Staff, Department of Defense, United States of America, August 2016, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Lee, Wayne. “Peace Chiefs and Blood Revenge: Patterns of Restraint in Native American Warfare, 1500-1800”. *Journal of Military History*, vol. 71.3, 2007, p. 704.

<sup>35</sup> Madlala, Suzanne and Alobaidi, Mayssa. “Sharpening Our Cultural Tools for Improved Global Health Engagements.” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, v82, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2016, p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Slaughter, Anne-Marie. “The Only Way Forward.” *Foreign Policy*, v221, November/December 2016, p. 66.

We must create leaders capable of engaging across multiple domains and who fundamentally understand and engage the humanity of war. The central idea of AFFOC is operational agility—but the Air Force is making it too complicated to get there. Let us be the leaders who enable. We contribute invaluable to the shaping of the battlefield by doing so. Let us be the masters of technology but also start to better understanding its effects—beyond the scientific reaction and into the human dynamics. Science does not always work; humans do not often follow predictable patterns. Let us change the internal dialogue and believe the external messaging. Airmen must speak with one voice. Let us acknowledge and accept what other service air components bring to the fight and *lead* them. The Air Force must stop viewing other components as “competitors rather than mutually dependent partners.”<sup>37</sup> Let us own our diversity and rule-breaking past. The US Air Force can add capacity, diversity and options for the United States. An airpower- (or space- or cyber-) only war does not exist, and war cannot be fully automated. The human interactions must be acknowledged and adjudicated. But every combat action will require Airmen to empower logistics, move personnel, evacuate injured, provide intelligence, and provide both indirect and direct kinetic support to the battlefield.<sup>38</sup> We remain best situated to lead the fight; the world is covered by air, watched from space, and connected by cyber. In order to do so though, we must acknowledge that airpower cannot act alone or outside the bounds of humanity. We must understand the human dimensions of warfare, and we must embrace the supported and supporting roles the US Air Force delivers.

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<sup>37</sup> Gray, Colin. “Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2008, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup> Gray, Colin. “Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2008, p. 69.

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