

**USAF CULTURE AND COHESION:
BUILDING AN AIR AND SPACE
FORCE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

James M. Smith

INSS Occasional Paper 19

Air Force Planning Series

June 1998

USAF Institute for National Security Studies
USAF Academy, Colorado

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This paper is approved for public release by SAF/PAS; distribution is unlimited. The findings of this paper are the result of research conducted during summer and fall 1997 under the auspices of an INSS grant.

Comments pertaining to this paper are invited and should be forwarded to:

Director, USAF Institute for National Security Studies
HQ USAFA/DFES
2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 5L27
USAF Academy, CO 80840
phone: 719-333-2717
fax: 719-333-2716
email: inss@usafa.af.mil

Visit the Institute for National Security Studies home page at
<http://www.usafa.af.mil/inss>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vii
Foreword	ix
Executive Summary	xi
Introduction	1
Culture	2
USAF Culture	10
Cultural Cohesion	16
The USAF in the Late 1990s	19
Institutional/Occupational Orientation	26
Mission/Priority/Allegiance	36
Technology/Space	38
The USAF in 1997	45
Building A Cohesive Force	48
Closing	55
Appendix 1: Survey Instrument	56
Endnotes	65

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Mosher's Schematic of a Professionalized Government Agency	4
Figure 2: USAF General Officer Profile	15
Figure 3: Military Higher Education Profile FY 1996	21
Figure 4: USAF Line Officer Education Profile FY 1996	22
Figure 5: Survey Response Demographics, Aug 1997	25
Figure 6: Survey Response, Additional Demographics, Aug 1997	25
Figure 7: Survey Response, PME Completed, Aug 97	26
Figure 8: I/O Orientation by Rank	27
Figure 9: I/O Orientation by Specialization	29
Figure 10: I/O Orientation by Rating	29
Figure 11: I/O Orientation by Specialization and Rank (Ops)	30
Figure 12: I/O Orientation by Specialization and Rank (Support)	30
Figure 13: I/O Orientation by Specialization and Rank (Science)	31
Figure 14: I/O Orientation by Commissioning Source	32
Figure 15: I/O Orientation by PME Completed	33
Figure 16: I/O Orientation by Gender	34
Figure 17: I/O Orientation by Joint Experience	34
Figure 18: USAF Mission, Priority, and Allegiance Rankings	36
Figure 19: Technology/Space by Rank	38
Figure 20: Technology/Space by Specialization	39
Figure 21: Technology/Space by Rating	40
Figure 22: Technology/Space by Specialization and Rank (Ops)	41
Figure 23: Technology/Space by Specialization and Rank (Support)	41
Figure 24: Technology/Space by Specialization and Rank (Science)	42
Figure 25: Technology/Space by Commissioning Source	42
Figure 26: Technology/Space by PME Completed	43
Figure 27: Technology/Space by Gender	43
Figure 28: Technology/Space by Joint Experience	44

FOREWORD

This paper by Dr. James Smith of the USAF Academy's Military Art and Science faculty explores the critical issue of Air Force culture and cohesion. It uses surveys of Air Force Officers attending the Professional Military Education schools at Maxwell AFB to provide a snapshot of how today's officers view important issues such as their role in the Air Force and the mission of the Air Force. By analyzing this data, Dr. Smith finds—contrary to other widely read but more pessimistic studies—that there are definite cohesion problems but also a significant degree of consensus among Air Force Officers on their role and on key Air Force issues. Dr. Smith argues that the Air Force can build upon these areas of consensus and evolve into a more cohesive organization. However, his analysis also reveals that progress toward building greater Air Force cohesion will have to overcome barriers such as relatively high levels of occupationalism among the pilots who form the largest group within the Air Force's core elite and significant disagreement over the role of space in the Air Force's future. We are very pleased to publish Dr. Smith's second occasional paper and announce that he was recently named as the new INSS Director.

About the Institute

INSS' primary sponsors are the Policy Division of the Nuclear and Counterproliferation Directorate, Headquarters USAF (XONP) and the Dean of the Faculty, USAF Academy. Our other current sponsors include: the Air Staff's Directorate for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (XOI); OSD Net Assessment; the Defense Special Weapons Agency; the Army Environmental Policy Institute; the On-Site Inspection Agency, and the Plans Directorate of United States Space Command. The mission of the Institute is to promote national security

research for the Department of Defense within the military academic community, and to support the Air Force national security education program. Its primary purpose is to promote research in fields of interest to INSS' sponsors: international security policy (especially arms control and counterproliferation), Air Force planning issues, regional security policy, conflict in the information age (including the revolution in military affairs and information warfare), environmental security, and space policy.

INSS coordinates and focuses outside thinking in various disciplines and across services to develop new ideas for USAF policy making. The Institute develops topics, selects researchers from within the military academic community, and administers sponsored research. It also hosts conferences and workshops that facilitate the dissemination of information to a wide range of private and government organizations. INSS is in its sixth year of providing valuable, cost-effective research to meet the needs of the Air Staff and our other sponsors. We appreciate your continued interest in INSS and its research products.

PETER L. HAYS, Lt Col, USAF
Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Air Force has a cohesion problem, and it is firmly rooted in Air Force culture, subcultures, and organizational dynamics within the diverse, complex entity that is today's USAF. This paper analyzes the roots and the current manifestations of that cohesion problem—defines and develops the problem itself—as a basis for some broad suggestions as to how the USAF can begin to mold itself into a more cohesive force for the 21st century.

By the late 1980s the primary Air Force internal divisions revolved around technologies, with splits between pilots and all others, among pilots based on the type of aircraft flown, and with space beginning to assert its claim on a piece of the core. The Air Force essence was centering on technology. Dr. Donald B. Rice, former Secretary of the Air Force, noted the overwhelming identification by USAF members with their weapon system over their service. Carl Builder characterizes the contemporary USAF as lacking any integrating vision, noting fractionalization with the space faction now heading off on its own toward a separate force future. He sees attachment to technologies without any glue to bind those technologies together around traditional roles and missions of airpower, with the result a dominance of occupationalism over institutional attachments. To Builder, the USAF has no strong, unifying mission or vision, so loyalty has devolved to functions, technologies, and occupations.

This study surveyed USAF officers to find more detailed answers to questions about what the Air Force looks like today--how it is oriented, where its main fracture lines lie, and what the intensity of its faultlines might be across specialties and ranks. The survey was administered to the students entering Professional Military Education (PME) courses at Maxwell AFB, AL in the late summer of 1997. The

study finds that the current picture is not quite as “bad” as one might think based on previous studies. It indicates that there is a common foundation upon which to build a more cohesive air and space force for the future.

The survey identified differences on Institutional/Occupational orientation based on rank, occupation, rating, PME completion, and joint experience; but found that the relative rankings of alternative missions, priorities, and allegiances indicated higher degrees of agreement across the USAF. The responses on technology and space indicated significant differences, and these must be targeted to bridge the gaps in these areas. The key differences were on the military utility of space, an issue that stands out in this study and is at the center of debates over the future of space within the USAF and calls for the creation of a separate space force.

So fractionalization was found, but for the most part the differences were perhaps not as striking as were some areas of similarity. The USAF line officer corps appears to provide a basic infrastructure upon which cohesion can be built. Building or fostering cohesion within a complex organization is a difficult task, but it is one that has been and can be successfully accomplished. What must be remembered is that culture change and cohesion are products of senior leadership reaching down into the organization—it is an internal, active, top-down process. It must begin with the clear definition of a single, unifying mission, and then that vision must be actively disseminated across the diverse subcultures and fractionated specialties before it can be embraced and begin to take effect.

The USAF strategy and structure must be realigned to achieve the critical operational tasks, roles, missions, and functions at the heart of the vision. This requires unified, active leadership reaching down to reshape the service through clear and cohesive guidance socialized

across the organization. Key here is creating a cohesive and encompassing team focus around which the diverse subcultures and specialties can (and will want to) coalesce. Rewards and incentives, promotions, and training must all be brought into alignment with this team concept to provide the “glue” needed to hold the reshaped service together until it fuses into a common whole. The new team must be socialized from the beginning of one’s service, and the culture and vision must then be reinforced across one’s career, not just in formal PME programs, but also via active mentoring by leadership at every level. The informal dimension will be key to the broadest success of this socialization effort, and it rests in the active mentoring of juniors officers by USAF leaders, a harder process to institutionalize and standardize. The final result must be changed output in terms of the performance and cohesion of the USAF team within and across the 21st century battlespace, and simple or singular attempts at solution may not be enough.

As the USAF completes this transition, it must also remember that the perceived coherence of the other U.S. military services must not be taken as a direct “fix” to unique Air Force issues and problems. The Air Force is simply not the Army, nor is it the Navy, and it is certainly not the Marine Corps. The Air Force must find its own answers within its own set of cultures and pressures: it must define, build, and sustain its own team within and against its own mission and vision. The team must be built, reinforced, and employed as a team, not just its parts, and the USAF incentive system must be aligned with that team concept. High-tech, complex, matrix teams can be productive, loyal, unified, and effective, and the USAF can and should expect or accept no less.

True, the Air Force has a cohesion problem. But the Air Force also has a common infrastructure upon which to begin to build its future, inclusive, more cohesive team. It needs to define that team, consolidate

its missions around that team, and actively promulgate, reward, and support its vision into the 21st century air and space future. The effort must be extensive and pervasive, incorporating formal education and training but focusing also on day-to-day, unit-level efforts to live the team concept. It must come from the top, but it must reach down to and through commanders at all levels in a continuing, cradle-to-grave effort across each airman's career. The fracture lines are real, and the technological and mission diversity pressures tend to pull the Air Force apart, so it must put real and focused effort into pulling together, not as a single entity, but as a team coming into harmony around shared missions and common goals. A team effort is possible, even if a single unified entity is not, and the effort must be made to bring that team onto the field.