



Reclaiming the Initiative: Organizing the Air Force for Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power

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Abstract

Shifts in the geostrategic environment and changes in the character of war over the past 30 years have placed tremendous strain on the US Air Force's organizational construct. Despite a pursuit to keep capabilities ahead of the threat, the Air Force's organization is still grounded in an era long past. Organizing major commands around platforms and domains requires airmen to use valuable time and resources to explain a construct that is not helpful in presenting, planning, tasking, and commanding airpower. Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power are the three great ends that the Air Force provides the United States, and they serve as the pillars of the service's independence. Apart from Air Education and Training Command (AETC) and Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), which directly train and enable the other commands, the Air Force should reorganize to establish three major commands (MAJCOMS): Global Power Command, Global Reach Command, and Global Vigilance Command in place of domain and function-based commands. These commands would be aligned not by the domain in which capabilities are employed, nor by the platforms that they own, but by the broad mission areas they are responsible to organize, train and equip.

Introduction: The Necessity for Organizational Change

Shifts in the geostrategic environment and changes in the character of war over the past 30 years have placed tremendous strain on the US Air Force's organizational construct. The Air Force has pursued capabilities to keep it not only relevant for national defense, but the premier service for delivering global reach, global vigilance, and global power for America. However, despite a pursuit to keep capabilities ahead of threats, the organization is still grounded in an era long past. Organizing major commands around platforms and domains requires airmen to use valuable time and resources to explain a construct that is not helpful in presenting, planning, tasking, and commanding airpower.

The Air Force made a great start in defining the functions it performs in delivering airpower effects during the fall 2009 "Corona" gathering, the long-running annual meeting of all senior USAF officials across the service. Specifically, a discussion on how to organize the service for vigilance was a necessary and excellent place to begin.¹ However, once that discussion was under way, it should have become impossible to separate discussing organizing for global vigilance from organizing for global reach and global power.

Eight years on from that Corona meeting, the Air Force should reclaim the initiative and once again undertake this difficult discussion, and make critical changes before other more detrimental changes are forced upon the service from outside. Worse still, the service could be relegated to a supporting role, if it does not reform. In taking this initiative, the Air Force will do what is right for the country and will reclaim its historical legacy as the most intellectually and operationally agile of America's military services.

The Air Force deliberately expounded what the service does in terms of its service core functions (SCFs) nearly a decade ago. The terms of reference from the SCF Master Plan state:

The 12 Air Force Core Functions are an integral part of the Air Force Strategic Planning System. They are the foundational elements, which form a framework for the missions, capabilities, and tasks that air forces perform and provide to the combatant commanders. The Core Function Master Plans serve to align each core functions missions, strategy, capabilities, and resources across the range of military operations in air, space, and cyberspace.²

Likewise, the 2011 version of Air Force Doctrine Document 1 (otherwise known as AFDD 1) states this about core functions:

Recently the Air Force refined its understanding of the core duties and responsibilities it performs as a service, streamlining what previously were six distinctive capabilities and seventeen operational functions into twelve core functions to be used across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities spectrum.³

For the purpose of presenting capabilities to combatant commanders, it is extremely useful to consider capabilities with service core functions. However, much like the self-evident truths from the Declaration of Independence, we must remind ourselves that core functions and capabilities are not ends to themselves. The Air Force does not organize train and equip to perform its core functions. It performs these 12 functions to enable and achieve global vigilance, global reach, and global power.

Organize for Effect, Rather Than by Domain

The Air Force performs its 12 service core functions in, to, through, and from all domains. While the Air Force recognizes 12 distinct core functions, in a broader context, the Air Force provides vigilance, reach, and power to the United States on a global scale.

Global vigilance ensures the US has the situational awareness to never be caught off guard, from surprise attack with nuclear missiles, or from the development of new tactics or technologies employed by foreign powers. Global vigilance

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enables not only global reach and global power, but also senior leader decision-making in support of national policy.

Global reach ensures the US is able to maintain a real, sustained presence anywhere in the world. Global reach enables global vigilance and power by delivering capabilities anywhere on the globe. Yet global reach is often itself the effect national leaders seek by building partnerships, delivering humanitarian assistance, or threatening force anywhere in the world.

Global power, enabled by global vigilance and global reach, allows national leaders to select effects along a continuum—from discreet surveillance, to humanitarian aid, to non-lethal and varying lethal effects appropriate to a desired objective.

The Air Force’s 2015 version of AFDD 1 states airpower leverages speed, range, flexibility, precision, tempo, and lethality to create effects from and within the air, space, and cyberspace domains at the tactical operational and strategic levels of war simultaneously.⁴ No core function can deliver those effects by itself. Platforms do not deliver effects. Capabilities, performed as functions presented to combatant commanders and led by an air commander, deliver global vigilance, global reach, and global power. These three effects are both “enabler,” and “ends” at the same time, and are not exclusive to any one region, domain, or person. Global vigilance, global reach, and global power are delivered throughout the world every day of the year, simultaneously.

In the opening pages of AFDD 1, the Air Force recognizes vigilance, reach, and power as what it provides the nation.⁵ However, it does not have a simple or cogent representation of how it does so. Absent an organizational construct, it is easy to be accused of paying lip service to these words and not showing how the service carries out these tasks. Headquarters Air Force and many USAF major commands organize staffs with responsibilities along core function lines. This has proven to be a useful and appropriate construct for ensuring the functions are prepared to execute vigilance, reach, and power for joint force commanders for longer than any officers on those staffs have served.

Countries and services have organized staffs and commands along functional lines since the

time of Frederick the Great, and yet for years thinkers have advocated that staffs should move away from a Prussian general staff structure. As far as how the Air Force should structure staffs, that issue is best addressed in another paper. But with respect to broader Air Force organization, Air Force senior leadership should consider that major commands ought to be established along global vigilance, global reach, and global power lines.



Figure 1: Rationale for three functional MAJCOMs. Global vigilance, global reach, and global power are the three ends for the US Air Force. These are enablers and effects at the same time, and the areas where they overlap are force multipliers. The center is where USAF is unique among the services, and justifies its independence.

Major Commands, Organizing, Training, and Equipping, and Joint Force Commanders

Today, staffs support USAF headquarters and major commands (MAJCOMs) with non-combat planning, programming, budgeting, force development, doctrine, innovation, and other staff work in order to free commands and units to focus on organizing, training, and equipping, the latter being the distinct purpose of the services, per Title 10 US Code. Hence, we must distinguish between the MAJCOMs and the combatant commands to which the Air Force presents forces.

USAF major commands are not war fighting organizations. MAJCOMS are the vehicles through which the Air Force fulfills its Title 10 responsibility to organize, train, and equip air forces.⁶ Thus, their

organizations do not need to be aligned to look like air components to combatant commanders. Apart from Air Education and Training Command (AETC) and Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC), which directly train and enable other commands, the Air Force should establish three new major commands: Global Power Command, Global Reach Command, and Global Vigilance Command. These commands would be aligned not by the domains where their capabilities are employed, nor by the platforms that they own, but by the broad mission areas they are responsible to organize, train, and equip for.

Air components to the combatant commands would continue to exist as force presenters and executors of airpower within joint force operations. Commanders of Air Force Forces (known doctrinally as COMAFFORs) within joint force operations employ all airpower capabilities within their operations. In contrast, Air Combat Command (ACC) and Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) do not in and of themselves employ forces to achieve joint effects. But the commander of Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT), for example, is the single airman responsible for planning, integrating, and executing airpower within US Central Command (CENTCOM). AFCENT's commander conducts operations with capabilities as enablers, and achieves as effects vigilance, reach, and power every day for the duration of their tour as the head of AFCENT. The AFCENT commander relies on Air Force MAJCOMs to organize, train, equip, and deploy individuals and organizations that allow them to present capabilities to achieve vigilance, reach, and power for the joint force commander (JFC).

Logic of Functional Major Commands

Reorganizing MAJCOMs by broad function will necessarily affect existing commands, their relationships to other commands, as well as the systems and platforms they are responsible for. But this change is necessary because the current Air Force organizational mix of functional and domain-based commands is not efficient or effective, nor

is logical. The current organizational structure impedes integration and effective presentation of air forces to joint force commanders.

Domains do not deliver vigilance, reach, and power. A domain is a region, both real (ground, air, space) and conceptual (cyberspace, and the cognitive domain). Air Force capabilities are employed in, to, through, and from these domains to deliver vigilance, reach, and power to achieve US strategic ends. Domains themselves do not deliver effects. Domains have characteristics, but no inherent capabilities.

The Air Force does not “do air” nor does it “do” space or cyber. The Air Force provides global mobility as well as 11 other core functions. But in the performance of these functions, the Air Force exercises reach, power, and vigilance in all domains simultaneously to achieve specific desired effects. It does not do so exclusively in any one domain. Without communication satellites in space and command and control systems through which data links and communications are transmitted in cyberspace, the Air Force cannot credibly perform any of its 12 core functions. Air, space, and cyberspace are places and regions not sources of vigilance, reach, and power. Those sources are the Air Force's capabilities, not domains or platforms.

Some might contend that if we do not organize by domains, we should organize by core function. But since core functions are not ends unto themselves, and since more often than not all or most of these are required to produce any of the primary effects of vigilance, reach, and power, it would not be logical to organize into 12 major commands by core function.

Implications for Commands and Numbered Air Forces

The implications for presently operating major commands under this proposed construct would be catastrophic, from the point of view of some, while it would be truly liberating for others. Some of these organizations would claim disenfranchisement and relegation to second-class status. But this would only be true from a personal perspective, not an institutional perspective. While this change might be upsetting for many individuals, this proposal is about preserving the long-term relevance of the US Air Force, not any one airman.

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The US Air Force exists to provide vigilance, reach, and power for the United States and not as an advocacy platform for any group, individual, or concept, nor to protect any individual position or community. The Air Force was once the intellectual center of the Department of Defense (DOD) and was recognized as the service that most easily adapted to keep pace with or stay ahead of a changing environment. Organizing by domain and fiercely defending that organizational construct in the face of a shifting character of war perpetuates what then-Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy lamented to Air Force general officers in 2009 as a drift away from the service's tradition of strategic thinking.⁷ The current Air Force organizational construct is at best unhelpful for the United States, and at worst renders the service irrelevant to future combat operations.

From another perspective, this proposal is liberating and allows the full potential of capabilities to be conceived, developed, and presented to Air Force commanders in any joint force operation. This change would put to rest the Air Force tradition of associating with several domain-based or functional tribes, and focuses the service on achieving effects and not protecting domains or platforms.

Space will be no less important to vigilance, reach, and power than it has been in the past. The Air Force, again, doesn't "do space." Instead, the service deliberately enables and employs capabilities to achieve effects for a joint force commander in, to, through, and from space. Only by embracing this truth can the Air Force leave behind arguments of ownership, and truly attain its higher goals as a service. The same is true in cyberspace. When the Air Force sets aside ownership of billets, it is able to focus on true vigilance, reach, and power in, to, and from cyberspace. Likewise, air combat is not exclusively about fighter platforms and who owns them. Air combat is about capabilities employed in and from the air, but never as its own end.

When Air Force Secretary Trevor Gardner and Gen Bernard Schriever helped to establish a

separate ICBM force from the flying community of US Strategic Air Command (SAC), it was because there was no room within the current structure to promote that capability for the betterment of the US. "Not only do human values and routines anchor organizations, but physical objects with specific characteristics generate a resistant mass weighted in favor of the status quo," Thomas Hughes wrote in his book, *Rescuing Prometheus*.⁸ That argument can as easily be applied to today's organizational inertia as it was in the early days of the independent Air Force.

Likewise, Air Force Gen Mike Worden wrote of the ossification of SAC leadership, which gave rise to the Tactical Air Command (TAC) officers who knew how to coordinate on staffs to further the service's interests in joint matters.⁹ Today the Air Force must be aware of its current ossification. The service's organizational justification must be based on delivering vigilance, reach, and power to joint force commanders. Anything else is, at best, difficult to justify.

Establishing these new commands would not mean the Air Force relegates air, space and cyberspace. On the contrary, the three new major commands would be responsible for integrating all capabilities in all domains to train forces and present capabilities to Air Force commanders. There will certainly be some overlap in functions simply because most functions enable vigilance, reach, and power equally—not any one in isolation. There will be seams, but rather than seeing seams as cleavages affording separation, this organizational construct allows for the seams to be seen as overlapping regions in a Venn diagram (as depicted in Figure 1). This is a positive development for the Air Force, as it forces commands to consider integration of capabilities and not their separation by domain.

Component numbered air forces (NAFs) would also be affected, but again, in a positive direction. Component NAFs would necessarily be separated from major commands. No longer would NAFs be built around platforms like fighters, bombers, ICBMs, and satellites, as they are today. Numbered air forces would solely be the Air Force service components of the combatant commands, providing vigilance, reach, and power in a single integrated service component.

Today the Air Force must be aware of its current ossification. The service's organizational justification must be based on delivering vigilance, reach, and power to joint force commanders.

Under this construct, no combatant commander will have to accept his Air Force service component providing power while some organization back in the US provides vigilance and reach. A hypothetical US Air Force Global Vigilance Command, Global Reach Command, and Global Power Command would be responsible for ensuring that units are trained, equipped, inspected, and capable of being deployed to and employed in any combatant command around the world. Thus, component NAFs would not be dual-hatted as combat elements and administrative control elements at the same time, except when forces are assigned for execution.

This organizational concept requires the Air Force to accept that there is a degree of specialization in certain capabilities and certain functions towards which certain capabilities will lend themselves. But it also recognizes that the Air Force organizes and commands to apply these capabilities to achieve effects, not because of where they operate.

Thus it is appropriate, for example, that capabilities lending themselves most practically to lift would primarily provide global reach. But they also conduct global vigilance through both technological and human capabilities. They likewise both enable and inherently achieve power effects through presence and delivery of materiel, both humanitarian and lethal. It is also appropriate that capabilities which lend themselves most practically to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) would primarily provide global vigilance. But they also conduct reach through the inherent

range and flexibility of platforms, and they provide power both in terms of the information they gather and the lethal capabilities airmen can employ through them. The same principle applies to capabilities that lend themselves most practically to lethal effects primarily to provide global power. However, it is well established that just as a remotely piloted aircraft can deliver global precision strike while performing the primary function of ISR, desired ISR effects can be delivered to a joint force commander while on a global power mission.

Conclusion

A Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power organizational construct allows the Air Force to achieve results far greater than the sum of its parts—allowing it to cease thinking in terms of platforms and domains, and instead think about capabilities to achieve effects. It is thus not up to a major command to determine how an Air Force commander will employ capabilities. Major commands organize, train, and equip units with capabilities that are then planned, tasked, and commanded and controlled by leaders of Air Force forces through their Combined Air and Space Operations Centers (CAOCs) to achieve effects for the joint force commander.

No longer would airmen be separated or separate themselves based on what region their platform operates from. Instead, they will come together to enable and achieve effects for a single objective or end state in an integrated force. Some structures will necessarily remain in place, however. There will still be a need for a Joint Space Operations Center, or other space operations center. There will still be a need for a cyber operations center. How the Air Force rearranges its general officer billets will be an important challenge to work through, but this will be a secondary concern in relation to the importance of organizing for service relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Change has too often been forced upon the military services from outside by necessity. The Air Force must reclaim its place as the service most agile in thought, not only in capability. Reorganizing not only demonstrates that initiative and agility to our national leadership, but is vital to the ability to continue to deliver vigilance, reach, and power for the American people. ★

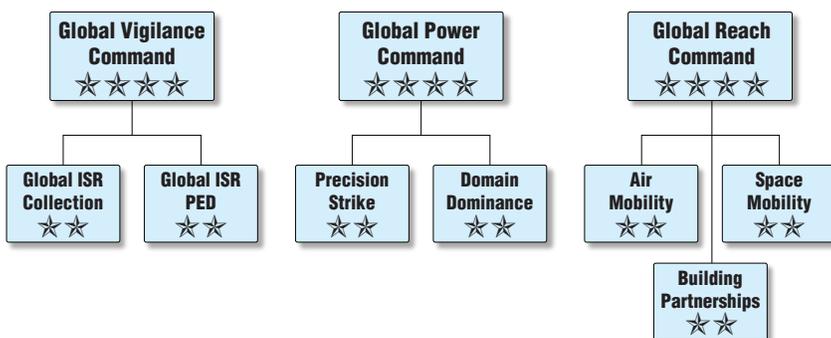


Figure 2: Proposed USAF major command construct. These three major commands would be aligned by the broad mission areas they are responsible to organize, train, and equip for, not by domain or platform.

Endnotes

- 1 Author's note: This section cites information from personal notes taken during Headquarters Air Force Air Staff preparation sessions and background papers for the 2009 Corona meeting.
- 2 Author's note: Personal notes from tour on Air Staff's ISR directorate as director of ISR doctrine. In 2010, the USAF Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Air Force directed that each of the 12 service core functions would have a master plan developed under the lead of a single major command. The terms of reference were guidance given to the major commands acting as "Core Function Lead Integrators." See note one on p. 24 of *Development Planning: A Strategic Approach to Future Air Force Capabilities*, Air Force Studies Board, 2014.
- 3 Headquarters United States Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 1, Air Force Basic Doctrine, Organization, and Command*, October 14, 2011, p. 43, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/cadre/aspc/l004/pubs/afdd1.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2017).
- 4 Headquarters United States Air Force, *Air Force Doctrine Document 1, Air Force Basic Doctrine, Organization, and Command*, February 27, 2015, p. 25, <https://doctrine.af.mil/download.jsp?filename=Volume-1-Basic-Doctrine.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2017).
- 5 AFDD 1 (2015), p. 4.
- 6 Author's note: For an example of how difficult it is to simply explain the functions of today's USAF major commands, see Secretary of the Air Force, *Air Force Instruction 13-103, Command and Control*, August 19, 2014, p. 11.
- 7 Author's note: These observations are gleaned from author's personal notes, taken during tour at Headquarters Air Force, 2009.
- 8 Thomas P. Hughes, *Rescuing Prometheus* (New York: Vintage Books) 2000, pp. 78-84.
- 9 Mike Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals* (Montgomery, AL: Air University Press) 1998, p.184.

About The Mitchell Institute

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