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Space Force Creation Warrants Revisiting Defense Unification

The American defense is dancing with its old nemesis. No, it is not an adversary per se, but the reemergence of questions on organization, enabled by the creation of the Space Force. This new service has attracted the ire of scholars, politicians, and even one of Starfleet's most famous captains.¹ It has also been subjected to no shortage of parody.² The creation of the Space Force nestled under the Department of the Air Force has ignited debate and rivalries not dissimilar to those which nearly crippled American defense in the post-World War II decade.

The post-war defense unification debates centered on the shape and scope of the roles and missions of the military services. Those who sought to referee the inter-service rivalries found themselves searching for procedural panaceas that would lead to an organizational utopia. Questions pertaining to the role and function of each of the military services were not resolved with the abolition of the free-standing military departments, so compromises were created. Agreements as those of the 1940s and 1950s focused on unity of effort towards workable strategy and defense policy. The compromises focused on that unity rather than rivalry should be the guiding ethos, particularly if another service was ever created. This has seemingly been forgotten with the creation of the Space Force. Civilian and political intervention had rejected that the American military would be held hostage to a system where one military department could alone control thought and theory particularly where new frontiers of military activity occurred such as space. These agreements were created as the United States nearly lost the war on the Korean Peninsula, exposing the perils of relying upon a single philosophy, military doctrine, or weapon delivery system. Meanwhile, unification debates distracted decisions makers, securing time as an ally for the communist threat.

Congress, as the final arbiter on defense, increasingly fought service cultures and rivalries as the unification debates distracted decision-makers. Central to these debates were bitter divisions between the Navy and Air Force.³ The pitting and testing of proven concepts, experience and new developments against one another ultimately resulted in rejection on limitations being placed upon developing coherent national doctrine where any single approach rooted in ideology became prominent. These disagreements demonstrated that questions over the role and mission of the services and their relationship with strategy making had become increasingly toxic. Civilian oversight increasingly fought service cultures, relying on a broad strategic thinking community to offer evidence and testimony. Congress' objective was to ensure services -- new and old -- were organized and equipped materially, legally and intellectually to work together with an aspiration to not suppress free thought. Congressional

¹ Bernal, Rafael. "William Shatner rails against Space Force officer ranks in op-ed." The Hill, August 26, 2020. <https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/in-the-know/513764-william-shatner-rails-against-space-force-officer-rankings-in-op-ed>.

² Anon. "Space War College struggles to find applicable Clausewitz readings." 2020. <https://www.duffelblog.com/2020/03/space-war-college-struggles-to-find-applicable-clausewitz-readings/>

³ Barlow, Jeffrey G. "Naval Aviation's Most Serious Crisis" U.S Naval Institute, December 2011. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2011/december/naval-aviations-most-serious-crisis>

authority was central to unification, reminding the service departments and all offices of defense they were not the final arbiters on many matters.

The unification debates and global events resulted in pressure on Congress. They pushed for access to a broad pallet of concepts, experience and historical analysis from the strategic thinking community, because it was crucial to American defense. The newly-formed Department of Defense was encouraged to not suppress free debate and thought while limits on ideological dominance remain aspirational. As a result, the Department of Defense faced the challenge of how to balance limits on emotive arguments and ideological dominance against being able to use and encourage open debate effectively. The challenge led to decades of the use and abuse of “jointness.” The experience of unification — which highlighted that limiting breadth and depth of debate — only served to hinder addressing strategic realities and the development of sound strategic thought. This was starkly apparent when reorganization related to changes to existing services or the prospect of the creation of a new service came to the fore.

The Perfect Solution That Never Was

The creation of Space Force was accompanied by debates that have demonstrated well-travelled and familiar divisions, which are rooted in rivalry, prejudices, and false narratives of the past. Arguments over space resonate with the rivalries of old, which were driven by loyal air power theorists. These theorists have viewed the creation of the Space Force as final vindication to not only the dominance of their theories but also misguidedly that space is an air force and air power domain alone. However, these debates — which vary on a range of topics related to the Space Force and space power — frame questions over the foundations, efficiency, and effectiveness of unified defense, and ask if rivalry and service culture reigns supreme against strategy-making.

Within months of the creation of the Space Force, air power advocates quickly turned to their prophet, Army aviator Billy Mitchell, who was the protagonist for an independent Air Force in the 1920s. His ghost deployed to define the culture of Space Force.⁴ The Air Force and their supporters’ attempts to expand their dominance are to service their cultural paranoia and perpetual insecurity over the question of Air Force’s existence since the 1920s. They sometimes add capabilities to their portfolio to prop up arguments for their existence rather than questioning if it serves their or the best interest of national defense. Notably, the Space Force underwent less scrutiny than the U.S. Navy or Marine Corps had undergone in the 1940s, when bitter conflicts between the Navy and Air Force mission were at their peak and the very existence of the Navy was in question. Suggestions and concerns raised across the defense community about the future of the Space Force were placated with offers of jointness. This ignored the fact that that organizational culture defines the environment in which thought can occur and that jointness should not be used to placate constructive criticism and feedback, nor manipulated to further single service agendas. Often, suggestions by naval thinkers were rejected and argued under the auspices that space force needs a blank slate. Blank slates rarely exist or become possible when they are set within an existing organization that has already rejected ideas and set bounds and limits. Those who promote blank slates for the Space Force will presumably be the first to support removing the Space Force from the Department of the

⁴ Smith James W.E. “Corbett offers more on space than Mitchell.” War on the Rocks Journal, December 11, 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/corbett-offers-more-on-space-than-mitchell/>

Air Force,⁵ enhancing the space power doctrine by protecting it from developing an ideological service bias.

Building a Strategic Space Community

Debates such as these echoed similar unification debates of the twentieth century. Unification debates fractured relationships, divided opinions and attempted to dismiss long-established experience while pushing new boundaries on civil-military relations, political oversight and fiscal control. The process of military unification failed to resolve anxieties of many of the services and culturally embedded concern of how easy it was to squander hard-earned experiences while demonstrating the perils associated with attempting to create something new. This was foremost in the mind of U.S. Navy Adm. Arleigh Burke. In the late 1950s, he observed other services rejecting changes to military funding of space and the creation of NASA. He realized that space would be a battleground for policy and warfare which would awaken old and long-held divisions, as he attempted to explain why space was best viewed in a maritime context but not bound to any specific doctrine, yet iterated space was still the best opportunity for all service participation. The negative response driven by interservice rivalries convinced Burke that the U.S. Navy would support the creation of NASA. Support for space through a different organization came with little surprise considering that navies had long been involved with exploration and working in conjunction with explorers, who often inherently militarized new frontiers — space was no exception. Although hopes that space would be a frontier in which humanity would escape some of the trappings of its bloody past, the space race of the 1950s and 1960s was equally about beating the Soviets than it was about the challenge of a new frontier.

It can be no surprise that maritime thinkers and air power theorists debate space. A maritime strategic view of space is evidenced against the ideologies of warfighting and air power doctrine. Space warfare thinkers have lined up their complex assumptions, attempting to mold air power doctrine to space like it is a square peg in a round hole. The maritime-minded use Sir Julian Corbett's *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*,⁶ identifying that similarly to the sea, space influences events on earth in support of military activity. Some of these concepts have started developing a spacepower doctrine.⁷ However, strategic space policy needs to be understood beyond military power instead, like maritime policy, where a broad spectrum of inter-relationships cross-ranging from science to trade, and from foreign relations to communications, amongst others.⁸ This is a reminder that organizations view mediums in different manners strategically, tactically and operationally. These are determined by how organizations view the art and theory of war, which reflects individual service specialties and preferences.

Building a new strategic community to best serve strategic space theory and space power policy only has to look to NASA for inspiration on how to build a community of talented intellectuals. NASA avoided any particular culture, shaping its community by drawing on a diverse range of talent. The Space Force's substantial draw from the Air Force could undermine

⁵ Spirtas, Michael, Yool Kim, Frank Camm, Shirley Ross, Debra Knopman, Forrest Morgan, Sebastian Bae, M. Bond, John Crown, and Elaine Simmons. 2020. *A Separate Space: Creating a Military Service for Space*. RAND Corporation. doi:10.7249/rr4263.

⁶ Corbett, Julian. *Some Principals of Maritime Strategy*, London: Longman, 1911.

⁷ U.S Gov. 2020. *Spacepower - Doctrine for Space Forces - Capstone Document*. 1sted. U.S Government.

https://www.spaceforce.mil/Portals/1/Space%20Capstone%20Publication_10%20Aug%202020.pdf

⁸ Hattendorf, John B. (2003) "The Uses of Maritime History in and for the Navy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 56 : No. 2 , Article 4. Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol56/iss2/4>

the rationale to its existence by pursuing a policy of cultural eliteness. This may be useful in limited circumstances - such as special warfare - but may be out of step with the space force mission . By contrast, Space Command has demonstrated the value of having a range of talent by being a joint operational command. Although intense scrutiny by Congress is vital, diversifying transfers would provide a crucial first step to enhance longer term aspirations and funding for space within defense. At the present, hopes that space would avoid the fierce rivalry akin to the past have increasingly disappeared and have been accelerated by the creation of the Space Force. This acceleration has been further enhanced by the singlemindedness of some who view space more in a warfighting air power model than addressing strategic concepts first. The optics of an air force takeover of space aggravated deep wounds and concerns in the culture of each service. Understandably, military services facing great power competition and the cost from the exhaustion of decades in the Middle East approached the political mandate to create the Space Force with skepticism. They could ill afford to risk service or broader defense by fiscally maintaining yet another service and potentially jeopardizing already struggling modernization programs.

Leave Behind the Eulogies

Today's vision for the Space Force, presented by the Air Force, hopes for a lean and agile organization with redirected Air Force funds within the Department of the Air Force. This was justified to reduce bureaucracy, costs and rivalry. Yet, it will have to be seen if it materializes as this has been elusive to planners across defense since 1947. The rise of the "more is better" philosophy demonstrates a lack of thoughtful reasoning and a requirement for an economy to support it. During the late 1940s, the Air Force criticized retaining the U.S. Marine Corps within the Department of the Navy, as according to them, it was an excuse to further justify the existence of the Navy. With Space Forces increasingly within Air Force's control it could be argued that it presents similar optics. Depending upon the budget requirements to operationalize the Space Force, the military branches, primarily the Air Force, may face difficult choices or turn to Capitol Hill to face voices who already doubt space forces funding. If they are to retain strategic readiness across defense, revisiting long term planning may be the only option. If funding is not forthcoming, it could impact the broader defense budget, potentially deepening rivalry, where other service advocates reject funding changes that could impact their services.

Service loyalties become useless if they betray the development of sound thought and if minds are closed to being challenged by new, alternative and classic theories. Although jointness remains operationally essential, it should not hinder challenges that jolt thought patterns from comfortable paths of thinking. Challenges present opportunity to hone and refine doctrine, policy and strategic models. Air forces around the world have pursued continental air force space models similar to the U.S. Air Force. Their own national air power dominance doctrines have also resulted in them promoting airpower and space as one, inflaming rivalry and doing little to advance thought and theory. For example, advocates for the British Royal Air Force openly declared that air force ownership of space forces and space operations is about the justification for an RAF, its funding and role in British defense. They promoted this role using outdated and distorted myths, such as the Battle of Britain in 1940. This demonstrates how space could be misused by advocates in the defense debate for alternative agendas. This undermines urgent calls to build a broad constructive forward-looking strategic space community, which is not disconnected from the wider strategic community behind a singular or departmental perspective.

Unification and Strategy: An Ancient and Troubled Relationship

The creation of the Space Force provides a warning marker that lessons identified in unification period had been lost: the dangers and damage of rivalry, the potency of old arguments, and the embracement of technicism over experience and outdated models. These are all emboldened by tightening resources. This may force fundamental questions buried wishfully or otherwise from the past to the fore. Strategic space strategy and space warfare will continue to grow in importance because of all service usage of space's resources and concerns in space itself with competitors while retaining first and foremost its classic ability to influence events on Earth. The creation of new organizations presents the opportune moment for strategists to think again by utilizing past knowledge and experience while not being held back by it. Space forces should be looked at as an opportunity, rejecting dogmatic often-schizophrenic compromises where departmental oversight and agenda automatically defines culture and thought, displacing strategic realities. Furthermore, outdated land analogies place unnecessary cultural boundaries to the space community developing new concepts. Those interested in the affairs of other domains should be scrutinizing space forces due to the potential of division over resources, which renews old problems. Air power theorists demand that debate, thought and theory remain exclusively their own domains should be consigned to history, as an outdated and a negative force. Building a community that focuses on advancing strategic space theory through engagement between strategists, researchers and defense practitioners should be free from the culture wars. Retaining the development of defense space strategy, space theory and space warfare concepts within the cultural ideology of one service will hinder progress, giving new impetus to explore questions long avoided: How many services are needed, what are their roles, how are they funded, and how does this all work together to form a national defense strategy?

America's space force has bought to the forefront, showing that many of the hallmarks of a system that unification was meant to be superior to have been renewed and replaced in a new monolithic organization. Defense and service departments are temporary constructs, reflecting national choices that are therefore worthy of continual examination as they often lose sight of their beings. Considering all the promises of abolitionists of military services and the free-standing service departments, many should be reminded, at the junction of the creation of a new service, that many questions and problems remain unsolved by unification. The first U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, stated in 1947: "Defense organization is driven by emotion, not by intelligence."⁹ He could have added that sentimentality — worshipping prophets and false narratives — when creating an organization defines its culture and hinders its ability to find wisdom from the repository of experience while thinking of how to address and respond to genuine questions and challenges. Adversaries are unlikely to share such sympathy and sentimentality over their organizations as they develop and execute their strategy.

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⁹ Robert Greenhalgh Albion, and Robert Howe Connery. 1962. *Forrestal and the Navy*. New York; London: Columbia University Press.