Changing the Air Force Narrative

Think Tank

Class 14E

Squadron Officer School

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Executive Summary

The Chief of Staff of the Air Force presented a question regarding how the Air Force should change its narrative to better resonate with the American people and Squadron Officer School class 14E's Think Tank endeavored to answer this question. The research team recommends a new Air Force narrative that spans the history of the service and will endure into the future. The team presents a new, enduring, motto that answers the question of WHY the Air Force exists and is uniquely suited to solve today's vexing geopolitical problems. The recommendations of this study include multiple courses of action by utilizing current research and literature in the public polls, social concerns, branding, advertising and marketing. The team focuses on the Air Force's unique ability to solve what the American public deemed as vexing problems through its use of innovative and technologically bold solutions and the importance of matching the narrative the Air Force presents with the problems it solves. The research involved current narrative issues and culture, looking at how corporate entities seek to brand their products, proving the importance of connecting internal and external messaging with the public's emotion. The USAF's current external message is centered on the mission of "Fly, Fight and Win … in Air, Space and Cyberspace." While this narrative adequately addresses what the USAF does and how it does it, the narrative does not adequately address why the USAF mission, core competencies and distinctive capabilities are important to the nation. The public is left to make their own determinations on why these things are important. The research team proposes changing the narrative from the "Critical Enablers" we adopted in the early 2000s to "Born of Necessity, Grown Through Innovation, Eyes on the Horizon." In order to propagate this narrative to the American public, the team proposed an enduring motto of "Defending America's Horizons." To explain this narrative, the team suggests focusing on internal and external

storytelling, connecting emotionally to the public and centering all messaging on WHY the Air Force is important. These changes can be accomplished through an integrated marketing strategy that is centered in a Media Operations Center focused on a unified media effort. The Air Force must join television and social media advertising to drive home the unique, bold solutions the Air Force presents to the multitude of vexing issues facing America today. Only by refining the Air Force's internal message with a timeless narrative, propagating that message outward through an enduring motto, and coordinate public relations efforts through an integrated marketing strategy can the Air Force ensure that its unique abilities and inimitable importance resonates with the American public. The team does not recommend a move away from joint-mindedness, rather a movement to display the Air Force for its true worth, allowing the public to determine the service's importance.

Changing the Air Force Narrative: Starting With Why

An organization's ability to posture itself in society, politics and culture relies on the unique and distinct story it tells. Public perception, organizational actions and individual influences evolve from the interactions between members of the organization and outsiders. How the Air Force tells its story, both internally and externally, contributes to the American public's view of the service's importance, influence, and capabilities. To achieve maximum effectiveness, an organization's narrative must be presented in a way that resonates with outsiders. This study strives to identify recommendations for Air Force senior leaders based on the questions posed to the Squadron Officer School Class 14E Think Tank by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force: *For the first time in nearly 65 years of polling data, no one service is perceived to be significantly more dominant than another. In light of this prevailing attitude, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force asked the SOS Think Tank to consider how the Air Force should adapt the story it tells the American people. More specifically, how can the Air Force best communicate its unique ability to use innovative technologies and concepts to address specific geopolitical and national problems? What examples might resonate best with the American people, and through which media outlasts should the Air Force deliver its messages?* To best understand what is driving the concern over lack of resonance, members of the Think Tank conducted a detailed background study and literature review.

Problem Background

In 2010, the RAND Corporation conducted a study on "how the Air Force contributes uniquely to the nation's security" (Thornhill, 2012). The study's conclusion was that the Air Force, more than any other service, excels at finding innovative solutions to difficult national security problems. The study also emphasized the importance of internal culture to the Air

Force's ability to continue this innovation. These findings prompted RAND's Paula Thornhill to write a paper on the Air Force's different cultural narratives throughout its history. She identified five narratives, beginning with "Over Not Through" (referring to the airplane's unique ability to fly over the trenches that defined ground combat in World War I) and progressing to the current narrative, which developed during the Global War on Terror: "We Are Critical Enablers" (Thornhill, 2012). These narratives have often been defined by individuals outside of the Air Force, demonstrating that the service does not define its own external message.

From April to May 2014, RAND conducted a separate survey and added another option, allowing people to select that all branches as equally important. Overwhelmingly 53% of

Another RAND study conducted by Dr. Alan Vick in 2014 used Thornhill's narratives to frame an examination of several polls and surveys conducted on the armed services between 1935 and 2014 (Vick, 2014). Perhaps the most striking finding concerns the American public's opinion on the importance of the Air Force relative to the other services. Gallup Polls conducted between 1949 and 1960 overwhelmingly showed that the American public viewed the Air Force as the most important branch of the military. In 1949 84% of those surveyed considered the Air Force the most important service and while that number declined steadily over the next few years, it remained a significant majority (60%) until 1960. When these polls were conducted again between 2001 and 2011, as the Air Force adopted the narrative of "We are Critical Enablers" (Thornhill, 2014), public opinion had changed drastically. The Air Force's popularity fell to a low of 17% in 2011 before rising slightly to its current position of 23%. In the most recent survey, conducted in May 2014, all branches were within a few percentage points of each other (Gallup, 2014). Although there were some slight differences in the phrasing of the questions from year to year, the general concept remained the same in these surveys.

From April to May 2014, RAND conducted a separate survey and added another option, allowing people to select that all branches as equally important. Overwhelmingly 53% of

respondents viewed all the branches as equally important. Among the individual services, the

Air Force was back in the lead at 17% with roughly ten points over the other branches. Dr. Vick

went on to point out that even in the Gallup polls, the percentage difference between the highest

and lowest service has been dropping steadily since the early 1950s (Vick, 2014).

Implications

In many ways, the convergence of public opinion indicated by the Gallup polls and the

preference for equal importance of all services in the RAND study are positives for the United

States military. The services have worked hard over the last several decades to transform

themselves into a joint, interdependent team, and this effort has proven successful. The public's

views reflect that joint focus. These changes are also likely related to the nature of the conflicts

the U.S. faced at the time each of these polls was taken. In the 1950s, and 1960s, the

predominant threat was nuclear war with the Soviet Union, and the American people saw the Air

Force as having the key role in deterring that threat. The focus in recent decades on ground

operations and counterinsurgency, in conjunction with increased media coverage of those

operations, has elevated the Army and Marine Corps in the eyes of the public and relegated the

Air Force to a supporting role. The Air Force has embraced this role due to a joint necessity and

reflected by its "Critical Enablers" narrative. This again should be seen as a good thing. The

USAF took on the missions our joint partners and the nation needed us to perform, and the

USAF excelled at them. The risk of this adoption is that the American people may lose sight of

the full spectrum of capabilities the Air Force can offer. Yes, we are critical enablers—but we

are also much more.

The Air Force's importance as an enabling force is evidenced by such key missions as

close air support, air refueling, aeromedical evacuation and rapid global mobility. However, the

Air Force also carries out many other missions that it is solely and uniquely qualified to perform. Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) operations, persistent Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), air-to-air combat, air-to-ground combat, space operations, nuclear deterrence, cyberspace security, and myriad other missions make the Air Force the nation's elite power-projection platform. The Air Force is the only service that can take action against any target in the world at any given moment. Constant innovation by leveraging key technological advancements, allows us to deliver global effects with immediacy.

Ensuring a strong and well-rounded public image for the Air Force is important for several reasons. First, public perception of the Air Force as the most innovative, technologically advanced branch will help ensure we continue to recruit the best and brightest. Second, the Air Force needs broad public support in order to continue to push the envelope technologically. In an era of constrained budgets, it is all the more important that we be able to advocate strongly for research and development funding. Finally, a pervasive belief that the Air Force is fundamentally a support service could influence political leaders to limit our freedom of action in an operational context in favor of greater oversight and subordination to the needs of our sister services. The changing attitudes towards the Air Force indicated in the Gallup polls and RAND study could translate directly into the loss of combat effectiveness.

Ultimately, the Air Force should not be overly concerned with its polling numbers relative to the other services. Vick suggested that it is unrealistic to expect any service to ever again achieve the level of public opinion dominance the Air Force held in the mid-twentieth century (Vick, 2014). Furthermore, the Air Force's rise in the most recent poll (from 17% to 23%) may indicate that the downward trend has reversed, or at least stabilized. But the mere fact that the polling numbers and internal narrative issues have caught the attention of so many senior

leaders and analysts is indicative of a deeper problem: the Air Force is failing to clearly tell its

story to the American people, and it must find a better way to do so.

Purpose Statement

To better connect with the public, the Air Force must change the story it tells, and the

way it tells that story. This study seeks to improve the Air Force narrative to better resonate with

the American people. The study will break down the current narrative, identify its weaknesses,

and suggest ways to fix those weaknesses. The research team will develop a new narrative that

fully encompasses the service's unique ability to deal with a multitude of vexing national

security problems. Finally, the team will propose a fully integrated, multi-pronged media effort

to communicate that new narrative to the public.

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Weaknesses of the Current Air Force Narrative

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To identify ways to improve the Air Force narrative, weaknesses of the current narrative

must first be understood. Research determined that the Air Force has surrendered its formation

of a narrative to external sources and lacks a clearly internal identity. The Air Force has also

failed to focus its attentions on the "why" of the Air Force and has instead focused on the "how"

and the "what" of the service, which has failed to resonate emotionally with the American

public.

No Clear Internal Identity

Developing a clear internal identity, while one of the most challenging aspects of

building a culture, is essential to being able to properly communicate an organization's story.

The Air Force's failure to connect with the American people is due in part to the fact that it has

been sending a fractured message (Vick, 2014). Thornhill (2012) stated that five distinct cultural

identities have dominated Air Force identity seem to emerge: 'Over not Through' (World War I

and immediate aftermath), 'Give me Liberty' (interwar period), 'Victory Through Airpower' (World War II), 'Peace is Our Profession' (Cold War), and 'We are Critical Enablers' (Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom). Before the Air Force can effectively tell its story to others, the service must first clarify its internal narrative. Clarity of internal messaging allows buy-in from members, presents a clear identity, and provides a foundation for external messaging. A clear identity will enable more Airmen to become advocates of airpower, better able to explain to the public what they do and why it is important. The "big A Airmen" concept has attempted to do this. This concept needs time to take root and should continue to be praised. However, a clear vision of why the Air Force exists is needed to drive the concept home. By adopting, through external pressures, the narrative of "critical enablers" we surrendered the formation of our narrative to forces outside of the Air Force, thereby losing our ability to shape our own story.

Current External Focus is on "WHAT" The USAF Does

Increasing the resonance of the external USAF narrative with the American public is similar to a corporation gaining influence through a carefully crafted branding campaign. Simon Sinek's (2009) *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* differentiates successful narratives from unsuccessful narratives based on the structure of their delivery. The framework provided by Sinek provides "an alternative perspective to existing assumptions about why some leaders and organizations have achieved such a disproportionate degree of influence," and is built around the three types of information that a narrative can communicate: WHAT, HOW, and WHY (Sinek, 2009). First, a narrative can communicate WHAT the organization does. These are the products, goods, services or capabilities that the organization provides. A narrative can also detail HOW these products, goods, services or

capabilities are provided. This category explains how an organization is unique or superior

compared to other options. Finally, under this framework, a narrative can describe WHY an

organization does what it does. This is an inherently a philosophical aspect of a narrative

because it speaks to the purpose of the organization's existence (Sinek, 2009).

      Sinek (2009) argued that all <u>successful</u> narratives transition chronologically from WHY

to HOW to WHAT. With this narrative structure, "the WHY is offered as the reason to buy and

the WHATs serve as the tangible proof of that belief" (Sinek, 2009). Most narratives tend to

start with the WHAT because these are the easiest to identify and explain. Similarly, these

narratives will avoid the WHY, since the philosophical abstractions are harder to relate. Sinek

(2009) also argued that defining an organization on WHAT it does can impose a cultural

rigidness and decrease the organization's flexibility in adapting to new opportunities.

      The Air Force's public website provides insight into the structure of the current Air Force

message (http://www.airforce.com/learn-about/our-mission/). The service's current external

narrative is centered on its mission to "Fly, Fight and Win … in Air, Space and Cyberspace."

This is the Air Force's WHAT. The mission statement is followed by the vision statement of

"Global Vigilance, Reach and Power," which represents the HOW. The Air Force, however,

fails to adequately and clearly address WHY the Air Force mission, core competencies and

distinctive capabilities are important to the nation. The public is left to make their own

determinations on why these things are important allowing for misinterpretation. The absence of

WHY diminishes the resonance of the USAF narrative. "When a WHY goes fuzzy, it becomes

much more difficult to maintain the growth, loyalty and inspiration that helped drive the original

success" (Sinek, 2009). Simon Sinek's ideas have already been embraced by many Air Force

senior leaders. His book was on the Chief of Staff's reading list and has been read by a large

population within the military. The concepts presented and adopted are simply not making it outside of the Air Force and have not entered into the narrative. The Air Force must focus on the WHY and this paper recommends an enduring narrative and a timeless motto to propagate the WHY.

Improving the Narrative: Building the Air Force Brand and Image

The Air Force can substantially improve its narrative by following the examples of businesses that have built for themselves strong, successful brands and images. At the heart of any good marketing strategy is an organization's brand positioning. It is the "act of designing the company's offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target customer's minds" (Keller, 2013). The Air Force brand must encompass the full spectrum of security options that it provides to the customer: the American people.

Utilizing Business Storytelling Models

"Of all the ways we communicate with one another, the story has established itself as the most comfortable, the most versatile--and perhaps also the most dangerous. Stories touch all of us, reaching across cultures and generations, accompanying humanity down the centuries. Assembling facts or incidents into tales is the only form of expression and entertainment that most of us enjoy equally at age three and age seventy-three."

- **Robert Fulford,** *The Triumph of Narrative*

Two of the most recognized brands in America today are Apple and Google. In 2013 both companies unseated Coca-Cola from the top position in Interbrand's Best Global Brands (Interbrand, 2013). Both of these companies have been rising for some time and their position is well deserved. Apple in particular is viewed as enabling "so many people to do so much so easily, which is why Apple has legions of adoring fans" (Interbrand, 2013). Both of these companies also have powerful messages that resonate with their target audiences. Google's corporate motto of "Don't be Evil" is visible in many of the innovative projects they do,

including providing 3G Internet to remote locations via solar-powered balloons (Interbrand, 2013). Using Sinek's (2009) arguments, these companies are so successful because they approach marketing and branding from a completely different perspective than most companies.

Further, as the Air Force communicates its importance to the public it is vital to do so in the genre of story. Giles Lury, Executive Chairman and Director of Branding of The Value Engineers Limited, describes storytelling as "increasingly used in advertising today in order to build customer loyalty. This marketing trend echoes the deeply rooted need of all humans to be entertained. Stories are illustrative, easily memorable, and allow any firm to create stronger emotional bonds with the customers" (Lury, 2012). Storytelling is becoming more influential and regularly utilized among Fortune 500 Companies. Smith (2012) stated, "Storytelling has come of age in the business world. Today, many of the most successful companies use storytelling as a leadership tool." At Nike, all senior executives are designated "corporate storytellers." The company even has a Senior Director of Culture and Heritage position who does not physically sell items but works to root the corporate culture and maintain the company's identity. The group was interested in this concept and interviewed the Director, Mr. Nelson Ferris. Nike leadership at all levels begins every meeting with a personal story emphasizing lessons learned and ties the individual's actions directly to the company's core vision, a process rooted in tradition (Farris personal communication, 2014). Additionally, stories have brought the more than 400 separate units of Nike together as one culture with a clear understanding of how individual's actions affect Nike's vision mantra "Everyone's an Athlete." This story-telling aspect could only strengthen the "big A Airmen" concept. Stories have the ability to engage an audience and "whether you are trying to communicate a vision, sell an idea, or inspire commitment, storytelling is a powerful business tool that can mean the difference between

mediocre results and phenomenal success" (Smith, 2012). As we seek to capture a diverse

public, leveraging the peculiar advantages of 'story' in external narratives will bring surprisingly

beneficial results.

Building Emotional Connections

It is vital that the Air Force communicate its story to the American public by targeting the

heart, not the head. A recent Air Force advertising campaign was built around the theme of, "It's

not science fiction, it's <u>what</u> we do every day." This theme emphasized the Air Force's

advanced technological capabilities, but failed to go beyond that surface level to connect with

audiences. In contrast, the United States Marine Corps' long-time advertising emphasis, "The

Few, the Proud, the Marines," makes an emotional connection with the audience. Nishi (2013)

explained that organizations must "find ways to connect with [their] audience on an emotional

level. Neuroscientists have discovered that most decisions—whether people realize it or not—

are informed by emotional responses." Additionally, Simmons (2007) emphasized, "the unique

power of stories comes from not only stimulating feelings but also focusing them on a specific

goal." To best tell its story, the Air Force must tap into the emotions of the nation.

Decoupling in the Public Perception

*"I believe that air supremacy - in all its components - will be indispensable to maintaining
American military strength, deterrence, and global reach for decades to come."*

- Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

*"Only the USAF can bring to bear prompt, scalable delivery capabilities that can avoid insecure
land routes and rapidly move people, equipment, and supplies into remote and dangerous areas
at (relatively) low risk."*

- *Shaping the Future Air Force,* RAND Corporation 2006 Technical Report

A successful narrative must emphasize and enhance the unique and irreplaceable

contributions of the Air Force, in essence decoupling it from the other branches. To create a

strong public perception, the new narrative must illustrate what the Air Force, and the Air Force alone, can bring to the fight. This can be done effectively by highlighting our core competencies and how these competencies solve what Americans view as the vexing problems of the nation without devaluing the importance of other services.

Identifying Geopolitical Problems That Resonate ("The Vexing Problems")

By turning on the news, one can find a plethora of difficult geopolitical problems facing our nation. Political and military leaders must confront issues from terrorism and Islamic extremism, underscored by the recent rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to a resurgent Russia intent on flexing its muscles in eastern Europe, to continued conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, to humanitarian crises like the outbreak of Ebola in Africa. Indeed, it could be argued that the most vexing problem facing America today is the multitude of vexing problems. Among all the military services, only the Air Force has the speed, range, and diversity of capabilities necessary to confront all of these issues simultaneously.

To identify some specific problems that are of particular concern to most Americans, the results of several recent Gallup and Pew Research Center polls on international and military affairs were analyzed. A Gallup poll conducted in February 2014 asked Americans what issues they considered critical threats to "the vital interests of the United States in the next 10 years." International terrorism and the development of nuclear weapons by Iran were the most prevalent, with a majority (77% and 76%, respectively) identifying them as critical threats. Also of high importance were Islamic fundamentalism (57%), conflict between North and South Korea (53%), and the economic power of China (52%). China's military power was seen as less important, with only 46% of respondents rating it as critical. However, since the potential for conflict with China is a major focus of future military planning, there is potential that the

American people will strengthen their conviction that Chinese military power is a threat.

Additionally, issues with China could be combined with the issue of North and South Korea into

a single outreach effort focused on the possibility of conflict in the Pacific.

International Terrorism

The American public has viewed international terrorism as the leading critical threat to

our nation since September 11th, 2001 (Gallup, 2013). The Air Force is uniquely positioned to

prove that it is the most important branch of service in combating this threat in the future. While

the United States has been fighting terrorist cells and non-state actors in major conflicts around

the world, future strategy has placed increased attention on developing irregular warfare (IW)

capabilities in conjunction with conventional capabilities (Peck, 2007). The United States is

fighting an enemy that has become powerful through the use of media, messaging, and

technology while spreading ideals through integration with local populations (Sullivan, 2006).

However, the current enemy does "lack and cannot effectively offset unfettered access to the

high ground that superiority in air, space, and cyberspace provides" (AFDD 3-2). Understanding

the capabilities of the Air Force within this strategy will aid in communicating the service's

importance to the public.

The Air Force has embraced IW and managed to posture itself for future engagements.

Pace (2006) described the key engagements of international terrorism and IW as the ability to

strike centers of gravity – strategically, operationally and tactically. Through control of

information, surveillance, tactical strike, agile combat support and rapid global mobility, the Air

Force is not only supporting the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts, it leads

them. However, Jorgerst (2009) believed that the Air Force would be viewed as a supporting

service if it only focuses on airpower. He asserts that while the power derived from the use of

airpower in COIN is indisputable, the effort will never be an air campaign. With that realization, the Air Force still leads a successful effort due to its unique five core competencies, specifically ISR, C2 and global strike. Furthermore, the general public has become wary of accepting collateral damage in minor counterterrorism or COIN campaigns. The Air Force relieves this concern through operations that can be employed with varying degrees of intensity and with less intrusive processes (AFDD 3-2). Additionally, a public that is interested in focusing on domestic issues benefits from a service that can deliver a range of effects without increasing presence in the region, especially on the ground. These effects, if employed by the Air Force, reduce the risk to military members while enacting the desires of the United States (AFDD 3-2). The Air Force has the tools to lead the campaign against the public's most pressing issue not only abroad but at home as well.

        While wars are waged overseas to defeat these non-state actors, the first key effort in the National Strategy to combat terrorism is to defend the homeland (Sullivan, 2006). Again, the Air Force is leading the way in this objective and should display this to the public. Air Superiority is vital to the success of any campaign and national defense. Since 1953 the Air Force has had air superiority in every campaign it's been involved in and has continued to strengthen this core competency (Pappalardo, 2014). In fact, a foreign aircraft has not killed a single American ground soldier during that time. This air superiority proves vital to protecting the homeland from any organization that may wish to do the United States harm through the skies. Current counterterrorism efforts focus on information operations, ISR, electronic warfare, network ops, and targeting, which are all either core competencies or strong capabilities of the Air Force.

        The last two key elements for victory described by Sullivan (2006) are to attack terrorists and their capacity to operate effectively at home and abroad, and to support mainstream

Muslim efforts to reject violent extremism. Any COIN campaign is not truly a military action

but an engagement between political, social and ideological entities. Therefore, how the Air

Force defines victory in future COIN or counterterrorism efforts will affect its ability to display

its relevance and importance to the American people. Hock (2010) and al-Khuzaa'i (2009) both

describe the need for building partner capacity (BPC) and developing foreign internal defense

(FID). These strategies will work to build foreign nation's air forces, and help to relieve the

lion's share of air support from the Air Force. Eventually, these foreign air forces will be the key

players in COIN operations, reducing the Air Force's footprint and resonating with the concerns

of the American people. The Air Force can also instruct on C2 operations, utilizing the service's

core competency and experience. This development of proven COIN concepts can be done

through units such as the 6th Special Operations Squadron while maintaining the public's desire

for low-visibility efforts with minimal collateral damage. The Air Force is postured to be the

irreplaceable service while combating terrorism in the future.

Nuclear Deterrence

Nuclear weapons have served as a strategic deterrent since their creation in World War II.

The 1950s were marked by a buildup of nuclear weapons to buffer tensions between western

states and the Soviet Union, while the 1990s were marked by nuclear arms control treaties to

handle the uncertainty posed by post-Cold War Russia and the former Soviet states. The events

of September 11th changed the nature of nuclear deterrence by sparking an aggressive campaign

to eliminate international terrorism and prevent terrorist access to weapons of mass destruction

(WMD). The emerging threat posed by rogue state and non-state actors has shaped the modern

nuclear deterrence strategy (Durr, 2002).

Nuclear deterrence is an inherent capability provided by the Air Force. DoDD 5100.01 directs the Air Force to "conduct nuclear operations in support of strategic deterrence, to include providing and maintaining nuclear surety and capabilities". Additionally, the National Security Strategy states a key component of national security is to "reverse the spread of nuclear and biological weapons and secure nuclear materials". The public already understands the "why" of nuclear deterrence. It is important that the connection from the "why" is tied to the fact that the Air Force is two thirds of the nuclear triad. This is also an area that the Air Force can develop internally. The internal messaging to nuclear operators has placed these individuals in a state of feeling non-important. Scandals in their career field have placed higher stress and doubt into some of the most valuable assets the Air Force has. The Air Force can stress the importance of nuclear operations and deterrence both internally and externally, resonating with a large group of individuals.

Anti-Access/Area Denial (Conflict in the Pacific)

Historical familiarity increases the strength of narratives crafted around international terrorism and nuclear deterrence; however, these narratives fail to scope the contributions of the Air Force to emerging national security challenges. Emphasizing the Air Force's ability to project power into a denied environment will demonstrate the critical contributions of the Air Force to future threats to U.S. national security. The American public will be less aware of the underlying motivation because this narrative is built around a vision of the future. Successfully conveying this narrative to the American people requires the Air Force to convince the public of two facts. First, the Air Force must convince the American public that anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) technologies threaten U.S. national and economic security. Second, the Air Force must convince the American public that the Air Force is critical to U.S. efforts to mitigate A2/AD.

An A2/AD technology seeks to deny nations access to global communes, such as air, sea, space and cyberspace (Watts, 2013). Examples of A2/AD technologies include anti-satellite weapons, anti-ship ballistic missiles, anti-aircraft artillery and missiles, cyber-attacks and undersea mines. When applied to the global communes, A2/AD technologies pose significant threats to U.S. diplomatic, economic and military power. These capabilities can impede U.S. support to our allies, disrupt the sea-lanes vital to the global economy and threaten U.S. military power projection (Greenbert and Welsh, 2013). Conveying this threat successfully requires leveraging A2/AD applications that resonate with the American public. Examples such as the destruction of Malaysian Airline Flight 17 provide a tangible example of how these A2/AD capabilities can be employed. Convincing the American public that these capabilities pose a significant threat is only half of the challenge. The Air Force must do this while also detailing its role in mitigating these threats. This message speaks to the "Why" in the Air Force narrative: the Air Force allows the U.S. to protect global national security interests despite the proliferation of advanced technologies aimed at limiting military access to air, space and cyberspace. The "How" is built around Air Force core competencies: Global Strike, Air Superiority, Global ISR etc. The "What" includes the specific military capabilities the Air Force provides to counter these threats: stealth bombers, precision munitions, global satellite communications, remotely piloted aircraft, etc. This outline will allow the Air Force to move past historical challenges and emphasize its role in the emerging geopolitical environment.

Recommendations

Based on the research presented above, the team formulated several major recommendations to improve the Air Force's ability to tell its story to the American people. First, the Air Force must embrace an internally defined narrative that speaks to WHY the Air

Force exists and connect it emotionally with the public by adopting a new enduring motto. Second, the Air Force must publicize its stories by leveraging many different media outlets and other avenues in a fully integrated manner.

A New Air Force Narrative – Identifying the Air Force's "Why"

In her paper on the different cultural narratives within the Air Force, Paula Thornhill (2012) seeks to identify a single, timeless narrative that underlies all others—what she calls an "origin story." She proposes "Over Not Through" as this origin story. It speaks to the reasons the Air Force was created, and it represents the spirit of innovation that has characterized the Air Force throughout its history. However, at its core, "Over Not Through" addresses why the Air Force initially came into being, but does not get at the key question of why the Air Force is relevant today. As the Air Force develops its new narrative, it must begin by communicating to America the "why" of the Air Force. If the Air Force is going to reach the heart of the American public it must convey why it matters to them. Why does the Air Force exist?

We believe the Air Force exists because air, space and cyberspace capabilities are ideally suited to overcome the multitude of vexing geopolitical problems facing the United States of America today and tomorrow. The Air Force celebrates diversity of thought, ingenuity and imagination because these beget innovation. This innovation provides unique capabilities that allow us to effect global change with immediacy. The Air Force answers the call to defend America's horizons.

We propose the following narrative to capture the Air Force's "why": Born of Necessity, Grown through Innovation, Eyes on the Horizon. This narrative is not fleeting; rather it is founded in history, it is enduring and permanent. Further, at its core, the narrative is not new at

all. As Thornhill (2012) recommends, it encompasses and underlies each of the previous

narratives and will endure into the future.

The Air Force's Timeless Narrative: "Born of Necessity, Grown through Innovation, Eyes

on the Horizon"

From the beginning of Air Force history, airpower has been used as a unique instrument

of national policy. The stalemate of trench warfare during WWI was a costly game of attrition.

"While the outcome of the Great War was decided primarily by horrible attrition on the ground

and a strangling maritime blockade of Germany, airpower had shown its potential for

autonomous offensive operations," and the Army Air Corps developed to take full advantage of

the gains that could be reached through Airpower (AF History, 2014).

Throughout the wars of the Twentieth Century, the Air Force saw a need that only it

could meet, and it rose to meet that need admirably. This was particularly evident during World

War II. Whether it was supplying Chinese forces in their struggle against the Imperial Japanese

Army through the Hump Airlift (Hanson, 2007), the Doolittle Raid striking within the heart of

Japan (Chun, 2006), or the easing of the Berlin Blockade through the Berlin Airlift (Hanson,

2007), the Air Force fulfilled missions and accomplished strategic and tactical objectives that no

other service could achieve.

The Cold War period saw the Air Force develop its deterrent capabilities, effectively

keeping the world from descending into another world war. By holding two parts of the nuclear

triad, the Air Force was uniquely suited to strike anywhere on the globe at any time, thereby

maintaining the balance of power in a time of great political uncertainty (Long, 2008). Airpower

was used exclusively to compel Slobodan Milosevic to agree to NATO's demands during

Operation Allied Force (Peters, Johnson, Bensahel, Liston and Williams, 2001). In the period

between the Gulf War and the return of ground troops to Iraq in 2003, only Airpower was

capable of maintaining the status quo and protecting the peace through Operation Provide

Comfort, Operation Northern Watch, and Operation Southern Watch (Byman and Waxman,

2000).

The Air Force continues to uniquely fill the needs of the American defense industry,

particularly in the realm of space and cyberspace. Air Force advancement in the space realm,

particularly in its development of ICBMs and subsequent space launch vehicles, was "one of the

great fundamental achievements of our age. It certainly made possible our space program"

(Neufeld and Hall, 1998). The Air Force is still the preeminent service in regards to space and

continues to operate, track, maintain, and control hundreds of satellites and space systems. Air

Force systems not only benefit the military but the civilian sector as well.

The Air Force has been, and continues to be, on the forefront of innovation. Airmen

began as a corps of air-minded warriors who were determined to fight a vigilant enemy in a non-

standard way: from the sky. The concept of air-to-air combat was still in an infant stage. For the

first time, aircraft were being specifically developed for something more than just flight. Aircraft

were designed to maneuver in relation to an enemy to allow the achievement of a position of

advantage, thereby gaining the opportunity to destroy that enemy. An all-inclusive manual that

would explain procedures and techniques for this type of combat had yet to be created. These

Airmen were able to show agile thinking and understand the positives and negatives of each split

second decision they made. They used their ideas and experience to find new and more efficient

ways in which they could maintain air superiority over their enemy (Rickenbacker, 2009). This

same mindset has been the Air Force standard for more than 67 years. The Air Force uniquely

encourages its youngest Airman to its oldest General to use their minds to find new and more efficient ways to accomplish the mission and take care of people.

The Air Force instills creativity into its Airmen by emphasizing the importance of four facets of knowledge that it deems most necessary: science, technology, engineering and mathematics, better known as STEM. The emphasis placed upon these academic and research components encourages each Airman to continually find new and improved ways to execute daily operations to ensure mission success. An example of this is from a lecture delivered by Lt. Gen Robert R. Allardice, Air Mobility Command's Vice Commander, about a challenge that was presented to US forces in getting personnel into the northern section of Iraq during the invasion of 2003. Lt. Gen Allardice stated that, logistically, getting forces into this section of the country by land was impractical and by sea was impossible. The only possible solution was the largest airdrop since the invasion of Panama in 1989. It took the creative efforts of many Airmen in different locations to generate a plan that would enable an effective and safe procedure to get Airmen on the ground. Lt. Gen Allardice indicated that the minds of the Airmen are what made this mission successful with his comment:

> "The capabilities STEM-skilled Airmen brought to the fight enabled an armada to
> join in a single point in time," said Allardice. "Great American Airmen were
> studying the weather - science; using GPS and night-vision goggles - technology;
> were able to operate in austere locations - engineering; and had planned over 140
> possible routes - math" (O'Connell, 2012).

The collective efforts of these men and women were able to allow US forces to successfully work an executable solution to a challenging problem, all while using their diverse backgrounds and innovation as the fuel to the solution.

Even though the Air Force has been engaging in a war in which they have a vast

technological advantage over their insurgent adversaries, innovation remains on the forefront of

the Air Force agenda. The Air Force recently implemented a program called "Airmen Powered

by Innovation" (API) to replace three existing "good idea" programs – the Innovative

Development through Employee Awareness, Productivity Enhancing Capital Investment, and

Best Practices Program (Douglas, 2014). The intent for API is to create a single source program

that will allow innovative Airmen to submit their ideas for improvement. This will centralize the

process and streamline creative ideas, thereby allowing the most promising ideas to be

implemented sooner. Due to the limited resources inherent in an era of sequestration, it is

imperative that the Air Force looks internally to find organic ways in which it can mitigate

excessive spending and waste. Those Airmen, who are actively executing their tasks on a daily

basis, have the most fundamental role in guaranteeing that the Air Force is properly capitalizing

on the processes and technology that can be upgraded to increase efficiency. The Air Force must

depend on its Airmen to not only improve processes, but also to create the ideas that lead to

technological advancements in airframes, weapons, and cyberspace.

The Air Force continually looks into the future, predicting changes in the nature of

warfare and developing its technologies and tactics to anticipate those changes. This has been an

emphasis of the Air Force since its inception, with General of the Air Force Henry "Hap" Arnold

believing that "any Air Force which does not keep its doctrines ahead of its equipment, and its

vision far into the future, can only delude the nation into a false sense of security" (America's

Air Force: Call to the Future, 2014).

"The Air Force's ability to continue to adapt and respond faster than our potential

adversaries is the greatest challenge we face over the next 30 years" (America's Air Force: A

Call to the Future, 2014). This statement from the Air Force strategy document *America's Air Force: A Call to the Future* demonstrates the key roles that innovation and adaptation play in ensuring the Air Force's future dominance. Airmen will continue to play a key role in that innovation. "An effective weapon system in the hands of innovative Airmen is incredibly powerful. Those who operate the systems in the field continue to discover uses that designers never imagined" (America's Air Force: A Call to the Future, 2014). Airmen, and the Air Force, will continue to look into the future to predict changes in the nature of warfare, and will use their innovative mindset to react to those predicted changes to successfully navigate all future strategic landscapes. "Success in the combat environment of the future will still demand ingenuity and imagination as it has in the past—perhaps even more so" (America's Air Force: A Call to the Future, 2014).

Having identified the Air Force's "why," we can build outward, in the order that Sinek recommends, to the "how" and "what." We propose that the Air Force's current vision and core missions fit nicely into this construct:

WHY: Born of Necessity, Grown through Innovation, Eyes on the Horizon

HOW: The USAF develops, fields, sustains and employs cutting-edge military technologies that provide Global Vigilance, Global Reach and Global Power.

WHAT: The USAF does this through its core missions of (1) air and space superiority; (2) intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; (3) rapid global mobility; (4) global strike and (5) command and control.

"Defending America's Horizons": An Enduring Motto for the Air Force

The narrative proposed above captures the Air Force's "why" and provides an excellent foundation upon which to begin building emotional connections with the American people.

However, "Born of Necessity, Grown through Innovation, Eyes on the Horizon" is too long to be

an effective tagline for Air Force messaging. Therefore, we propose that the Air Force distill this

narrative into a new motto that can be used to shape both internal and external messaging:

"Defending America's Horizons."

     In the Air Force's 67-year history, it has adopted many mottos. Mottos are meant to be

short, effective, and memorable. They quickly inform consumers about what the company has to

offer and what the company is about. Mottos are develop to last for years, if not decades. Recent

Air Force mottos have included: "Aim High…Fly-Fight-Win," "Cross into the Blue," "Do

Something Amazing," and "We've Been Waiting For You." These mottos have met the

standards of short, effective, and memorable, but unfortunately, the Air Force motto seems to

change very frequently, leaving many Airmen with "motto fatigue." Additionally, the current

Air Force motto of "Aim High" is insufficient in terms of how it tells the story of the Air Force

and how it operates in today's environment (Kohli et al., 2007). Most importantly, none of the

mottos in the past have described the "WHY" of the Air Force. Therefore, we suggest the Air

Force change its motto and the narrative it tells the American public one final time, this time

ensuring the narrative is enduring and all encompassing. Since the service's inception, the Air

Force has been known for its technologies, its innovation in terms of both technology and tactics,

and the continual ability of the Air Force to predict and adapt to the changing nature of war

through its innovation. This aspect is integral to the Air Force and the motto must in turn reflect

this unique ability. The motto the Air Force should adopt is "Defending America's Horizons."

     "Defending America's Horizons" speaks to the unique mission of the Air Force and the

innovation inherent in the Air Force's identity. The Air Force is both the nation's defense and

offense. It defends our skies and population and can strike anywhere in the world at a moment's

notice. The reference to the horizon has multiple meanings. The first signifies how the Air Force protects the United States from afar; the horizon is a distant place and serves as a bubble of America's defense zone. The Air Force defends against threats far before they reach American shores. This horizon is not just physical but also temporal; the horizon represents the future. The Air Force has its focus on future horizons; it is looking to find new ways to accomplish the mission. The Air Force relies on its innovation from within the service to defend the nation and be the premier branch within the Department of Defense, demonstrating that the horizon can also be technological in nature. This motto can be sold to all demographics within the American public. It does not depend on the educational background, age, or financial status of the person hearing the motto. As the best stewards of the Air Force's innovation and technological advancements, Airmen can rally behind the meaning of the motto and sell it to the American public. This motto, and the way in which it reflects and advertises the enduring identity and narrative of the United States Air Force and answers the Air Force's WHY, will cement the service's purpose and importance in the minds of the American people.

The Necessary Multi-Pronged Media Approach

In order for the public to embrace the new motto, and more importantly embrace the Air Force, it must be shared with the public. This should be accomplished with a concerted media effort. The following are several domains in which the Air Force will operate to share its narrative with the American public. While the Air Force has used most of these media outlets in the past, the way in which the proposed media strategy differs from current strategy is the synergistic way in which we plan to bring these methods together. The fusion of all of these methods, and the concerted organized effort to propagate information through the Media Operations Center, will lead to a greater resonance of our narrative with the American public.

Television and Film

  Several different types of visual media have been used by the United States military, most notably television and film. Television has been a primary source of information for Americans since its inception. What the American public sees or does not see shapes their opinions of the military. The Air Force's daily operations and impacts have not had the same attention as those of ground forces since 2001. Unfortunately, a truth about media is "that the media will report on death and failure before life and successes" (Burns, 2006). A large conventional war with a substantial air campaign may put Airpower at the forefront, but future insurgencies and failed state concerns may keep the successes of the Air Force from the headlines.

  As it has done for many years, the Air Force should continue to use television advertisements to tell its story. Moving forward, though, the Air Force should seek to develop an advertising campaign with a simple, consistent message that is relayed through a unique, attention-grabbing commercial. This commercial should be no more than fifteen-seconds in length with three main points or fewer (Nielsen, 2014). Furthermore, these commercials should not focus on what we do but tie into the emotional "why" for the public. As the commercials air, the Air Force needs to pre-load the commercials onto its website and social media sites such as YouTube. It should also work on search engine optimization to aid individuals in finding the clips. For example, our Think Tank group heard about the Air Force's new commercial campaign featuring General Welsh. Our group of 24 individuals attempted to find the commercial utilizing common search engines. On average, it took each member four to five minutes to find the ad. For individuals who are searching for the ad and may not know the

CSAF's name, the content of the ad or where to look, this time line would result in losing individuals to other, more "enticing" videos or content.

Beyond advertising, television also offers opportunities to tell history in interesting and exciting ways. A certain type of program, the docudrama, can be seen as a combination of a documentary and a drama whereby historical events are dramatically, yet truthfully, reenacted. This type of television program could be useful for the purpose of telling the Air Force story. Unlike a simple narrated historical program, the docudrama can bring past and present Airmen and key Airpower events to life, affecting a wider audience with more emotion.

The portrayal of the Air Force in feature films played its most significant role in public opinion during WWII. In the lead up to the war, Hollywood recognized how vital it was to promote American military strength and foster public opinion, because "if America entered the war, it would be total war for survival not a mere conflict" (Osborne, 1990). Yet, there were still dissenters that saw Hollywood's involvement as "warmongering," and forced congressional hearings to investigate the motives of filmmakers (Osborne, 1990). However, Pearl Harbor ended this dissention as it became clear that America was involved in total war. The remainder of WWII saw an environment in which military films were produced with close cooperation between the government and the motion picture industry.

Following WWII, particularly during the Korean War, military films were never a favorite for producers, largely due to the lack of full American public support resulting from questions of American involvement and the issues surrounding the war (Osborne, 1990). Then, the Vietnam era saw films become more anti-war, as the American public was tired of a protracted war, and concerns with internal issues abounded (Osborne, 1990). Today's environment, with a combination of protracted conflicts, domestic issues, a lack of a unified

enemy, and future threats of near-peer adversaries, insurgencies, and failed states does not

suggest that a Hollywood-produced feature film would be as attractive to, or create the impact

on, the American public as in past scenarios. The current portrayal of Air Force technologies

embedded within a larger film framework like "Transformers" or "Iron Man" will likely

continue, perhaps sparking some interest in the Air Force for recruiting purposes, but not

effectively telling the Air Force narrative.

While a Hollywood feature film would fail to adequately tell the Air Force's narrative in

a way that would resonate with Americans, a documentary film may be a viable option.

Documentaries provide a means to inform, educate, and tell a story in a meaningful, relatable

way. In particular, documentaries are able to act "as a way to explore multiple perspectives and

as a way to teach about controversial issues" (Marcus and Stoddard, 2009, p. 279). A

documentary is an avenue to tell the Air Force narrative from an Airman's perspective as today's

military use and involvement is both reliant on multiple perspectives and controversial.

Furthermore, documentaries are "often perceived as trustworthy when compared to their feature

film counterparts because they more closely resemble written history in form and narrative."

(Marcus and Stoddard, 2009, p. 280) An effective documentary would illustrate historical

examples where Airpower and Airmen were needed, how innovation met or exceeded said need,

and then how forward-thinking Airmen continued to progress, create, and innovate. This would

lend credence to the historical part of the Air Force narrative, then the film would turn to the

current needs or threats that only the Air Force can fulfill or defeat, and finally it would show the

current Airmen and their innovative minds that secure America's future. They would span the

whole of the Air Force's capabilities, focusing on the force in its entirety, rather than focusing on

specific career fields the way past documentaries have. The film should also be steadfast in

telling the truth, whether good or bad, in order to be transparent and effectively portray the

human side that makes Airmen great. This avenue should also emphasize how the Air Force is,

and will continue to be, necessary to national defense.

Print Media

An underused method that can be adopted to sell the mission of the Air Force and

highlight the innovation of the Airmen is print media, specifically books. When the Air Force

was in its infancy, books on Airpower and the Air Force were published frequently. However,

1944 saw a peak of aviation and airpower books (Vick, 2014). Since that time, the percentage of

books related to airpower and aviation has declined significantly. The two most popular decades

for books written by senior Air Force leaders were the 1940s and 1960s (Vick, 2014), the times

in which the Air Force popularity was extremely high. These statistics show a possible

correlation between public opinion of the Air Force and the number of books written regarding

airpower.

Writing and storytelling should be encouraged throughout the entire Air Force, including

junior Airmen. Senior officers use storytelling to motivate individuals; we recommend this be

pushed to every Airman in the service. One such way to facilitate this increased publication in

the Air Force is to have a force-wide short story competition. Airmen should be given the

opportunity to write a short story chronicling their service, about how they have been innovators,

and why the Air Force is the most important military branch. They should be encouraged to draw

on their operational experiences, their education and technical background, and their strategic

viewpoints on where the Air Force must go in the future. From these submissions, a group of

short stories will be published and available in bookstores throughout the nation, thereby taking

the Air Force narrative to the public. To supplement this competition, the Air Force should

develop a policy where every Chief of Staff and Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

contributes a story. This would encourage senior Air Force leaders to share their stories and

experiences with the public, encouraging a culture of writing in the Air Force that will bolster

public opinion. The Air Force will not be saying we're the best, but simply telling our story to

the public and letting them decide.

Interactive Media

The world is becoming increasingly technical, interconnected, and digital. Mobile

devices and the applications (apps) they offer have grown increasingly popular and profitable in

recent years. These apps are not only available for mobile phones, but they are now being

tailored to tablets and televisions as well (Lessin and Ante, 2013). Similarly, few things capture

the imagination of today's youth like video games, and few adults are unaffected by these games

through their exposure to their children, grandchildren, and popular culture. According to a study

by the Entertainment Software Association, 58% of Americans play video games (Entertainment

Software Association, 2013).

Ian Bogost, in his book *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, makes

a case for using interactive software like an app or a video game to inform the public about the

USAF mission:

> "Videogames are an expressive medium. They represent how real and imagined
>
> systems work. They invite players to interact with those systems and form
>
> judgments about them." (Bogost, 2010, p. 44-46)

This medium provides an opportunity for a well designed and marketed game that could

cement the Air Force Core Values and demonstrate the diversity in personnel, competencies and

equipment required to effectively defend the nation using air, space and cyberspace.

The Army developed and released a game in mid-2004 called *America's Army* as a recruiting tool. The game has been updated over the years and is an overt attempt at recruiting and glorifying the tactical first person shooter aspect of Army life. It can be downloaded for free and takes advantage of existing gaming engines. Users are periodically prompted to inquire further about Army careers in order to continue playing the game, but that hasn't influenced its success and it was honored in the Guinness Book of World Records for "Most Downloaded War Game" in 2009 (Glenday, 2009).

The Air Force can, and should, take advantage of the medium of interactive media to appeal to the American public. This could begin as an app, which would have lower costs and a faster development time, but could be developed into a follow on video game to maximize audience and take advantage of the increased capabilities of video games. Many flight simulators of the recent past have given a glimpse into the capabilities of past and current USAF aircraft, but this proposed game would be much more than a flight simulator. While it would incorporate some of the expected flight simulator and first person aspects one would expect in a modern video game, the game would encompass as many aspects of contemporary airmanship as practical. Much like reality, the game would include challenges that would demonstrate the critical thinking and problem-solving skills the Air Force demands of its Airmen, present and future. Examples include puzzle and riddle style games, as well as strategy games that could include most major Air Force Specialty Codes as well as enlisted and officer positions.

The game could follow a number of different formats. A first person adventure could take an Airman from the inception of airpower over 100 years ago through the modern age engaging in the many different facets of the Air Force's capabilities as it switches between many different "personalities." It could also begin at any time in the continuum. Different "missions" could be

chosen that replicate those of the Air Force's most revered heroes, from Bong to Levitow to Sijan to Olds. Heritage could be reinforced while showcasing current capabilities, thereby spreading the Air Force narrative and touting the necessity of Airpower.

Online Marketing

Internet advertising has been around since the early 1990s, but its effectiveness has skyrocketed in the last decade. In 2012, it was estimated that there were 1.2 billion Internet users worldwide, with 87% of Americans actively online (Wilson, 2013). Access to the majority of the population is not enough, though. Traditional online marketing ads, such as popups and banners, are becoming less and less effective. Banner ad click through rates have dropped from 9% in 2000 to just 0.2% in 2012 (Wasserman, 2012). This means that the average Internet user will only pay attention, and respond, to 1 in 500 advertisements. To combat this desensitization, new techniques have been developed by marketers.

Social media is a broad term for websites that allow users to create, view, and share their own content. This includes everything from uploading videos to YouTube, creating profiles on Facebook and LinkedIn, and sharing ideas and thoughts on Twitter. Marketing companies have partnered with social media providers, like Facebook and Google, and are now able to characterize individuals by their Internet history, personal data, and uploaded media. This information is then used by marketers to present tailored ads to that user. Two different users can be presented with two completely different advertising strategies even if they go to the exact same website. Marketers can choose to have certain ads be shown only to certain demographics; for example, only showing alcohol ads to users that are older than 21. This targeting of advertisements focuses the marketing efforts on the ideal demographics, increasing the effectiveness of the message.

Another facet to social media is it allows users to participate with a company or organization's marketing efforts. If an organization has social media accounts created, like a Facebook page or a Twitter account, they can put out instant updates and messages to their followers. If the message is well-received, the recipient can then resend it to their friends and family, further disseminating the message. This cost-effective "viral" marketing strategy can be highly effective if done correctly.

Social media marketing is ideal for disseminating short messages and pictures, but native advertising is the best method for presenting media that can change public opinion. Native advertising is a term for marketing content that is presented to a user without being expressly formatted as an advertisement. In particular, companies and organizations are now sponsoring articles on news websites, sometimes even written by the news staff themselves. The only detail that identifies the article as an advertisement is usually a small message near the top of the article that reads "Sponsored Content." This method, if done correctly, actually adds to the user's experience while presenting them with a structured message from the sponsor. An example of recent native advertising is and article, "Will millenials ever completely shun the office?" sponsored by Dell, written by a New York Times journalist, and featured on nytimes.com (Anderson, 2014). In telling the "Air Force story", the Air Force could sponsor such content as well. Such stories could include an article on how GPS enables businesses, how World War III was prevented by Strategic Air Command, or how the Air Force supported Haiti after its devastating earthquake. The Air Force is writing similar articles on af.mil, but native advertising would provide a larger forum for greater access and a more effective means for advocating the Air Force.

Just as a successful air campaign involves coordination between all of the air assets,

successful online media campaigns need to be in sync with their products as well. While the Air

Force is active in online media, it seems that the public affairs efforts online so far have been

uncoordinated. Again, the Air Force's new advertising campaign left out resources such as

internet coordination, teasers or social media interaction. A coordinated approach would have

cued Airmen to look for the new commercials, guided social media users to the Air Force's page

and provided interactive aspects to keep users involved. As an example of a successful social

media approach, Nike utilized a five-minute inspirational video related to the World Cup as a

means of advertising. Beyond the product placement, Nike's name did not appear until the end

of the video. This video was also shared on YouTube, Facebook and multiple other social media

avenues. Nike relied completely on individuals sharing the video with friends to spread the

message. The message, however, focused on the emotional why factor of the World Cup and its

athletes. It was clear, non-corporate, and inspired the public. Nike was able to track when and

where the video was watched while gathering demographic information about those viewing

their ads. The Air Force should capitalize on the amazing power of social networking to

promote short films about why the Air Force is important, connecting to the emotional side of

individuals and avoiding a canned structure of relaying information.

Bottom-Up Campaigns

The Air Force narrative is inherently a message that comes from within the service,

which suggests it should take hold and grow from within, at the grassroots level. While the

previously suggested approaches to reaching demographics across the American public are

strong and likely to have an impact, they are designed as a top-down approach. Therefore,

another key aspect of the multi-pronged media blitz is to create a grassroots campaign, to effect a

change in perceptions both within and without the Air Force, from the bottom-up. In a day when media and news is all around, a word on a subject from a close friend or trusted advisor can make all the difference to an individual. That close friend's impression about the Air Force's preeminence is exactly what is hoped to be achieved through this campaign. Using the following methods, we would hope to create such a cultural shift in the American public's beliefs on what is contributed by, and what is unique to, the Air Force. Push the story-telling to the Airmen!

Air Force Discussion Groups

The way to start off this grassroots campaign is to harness the power and insight of the hardworking, intelligent and initiative-taking Airmen at bases around the globe. The Air Force should utilize the concept of think tanks and focus groups wherein small groups of people come together to tackle a particular problem or issue. These extra-curricular groups would be much like the intellectual groups that people like former presidents William H. Taft and Theodore Roosevelt joined growing up, where the group would read books, share ideas, and discuss issues of the day (Goodwin, 2013). In these kinds of social interactions, issues like Air Force public perception could be brought up, and discussions and research could be conducted in a free-spirited approach to learning that would help bring out ideas. Group members could be vectored onto a specific topic by senior leaders, and then be allowed to come up with solutions and methods for increasing public opinion in their local or regional area. The benefits of this would be two fold. First, it would help raise awareness of the issue of public perception in the Air Force itself, and would help educate Airmen about what it is they do on a grand scale, and why what they do on the small scale matters. Secondly, it would allow those Airmen to spread the Air Force story to others in the civilian world, letting people hear about the preeminence of the Air Force from a trusted group of friends, neighbors and family members. Members should be

encouraged to grow the group with high-speed individuals through active recruitment and

mentoring.

Air Force Identity Education and Cross-Talk

Another way in which a grassroots campaign could be effective in getting the Air Force

narrative out to the public would be through more professional education opportunities for

Airmen. Often Airmen feel that they lack a common identity, instead identifying themselves by

their specialty or job. This leads to Airmen only seeing their small piece of the Air Force, only

understanding what they do on a day to day basis, and thereby missing the impact of the service

as a whole. By increasing career field cross-talk at the junior level and providing education that

allows for the lowest ranks to understand the Air Force mission, how what they do ties into it,

and how it creates new technologies or ensures the safety of our nation, Airmen will be better

able to talk intelligently and positively about the service. A great example of this cross-talk

opportunity is the experience Company Grade Officers (CGOs) have at Squadron Officer School

(SOS). SOS provides an excellent opportunity to learn what other people in the Air Force do,

how each person contributes, and how each person is necessary and interconnected in making the

mission happen. A CGO's view of the Air Force is magnified by this cross talk, and is then

better able to advocate for the Air Force. This professional development needs to happen

continually at all levels of the Air Force, and with greater frequency (Kezar et al., 2011, p. 139).

External Partnerships

The next thing the Air Force can do at a higher organizational level in this grassroots

campaign is to partner with existing external networks. One of the greatest inhibitors of telling

the Air Force story is classification levels, and the inability to talk about precisely what we do.

However, there are other organizations that are also working to convey a message with these

same concerns and may have lessons learned or a shared message the Air Force can take

advantage of. Two great examples of such organizations are Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Both

of these defense contractors air commercials and print ads in order to increase the public's

opinion of them and to garner public support, despite the fact that both companies deal with

highly classified technical data and projects, and despite having no product that is sold directly to

individual consumers. If the Air Force joined forces with its contractors and industrial base, a

joint story putting forth history, innovations, capabilities and future directions could be put out

on a larger scale, reaching more audiences and demographics than any single organization could

alone. Additionally, this kind of combined campaign could allow for best practices and

knowledge sharing in terms of marketing and reaching demographics, which would allow for

impressions to be increased, and the Air Force story to be told more effectively (Kezar et al.,

2011, p. 145).

Throughout this grassroots campaign, the Air Force should use data to tell its story. This

would be most important with the more educated demographics and key stake holders, but

having hard numbers to convince the public of the importance of the Air Force and its need for

resources is key. Numbers that show our capabilities should be espoused, like the accuracy of

precision weapons and the numbers of weapons/sorties employed in previous conflicts. The

numbers of lives saved per mission and the number of terrorists killed would speak to our

successes and relevance in the current war on terror. Additionally, the public should understand

why the resources we need are important. By breaking down the numbers for people throughout

the other parts of the grassroots campaign, the Air Force will allow people to come to the

conclusion of why we are so important and need to be supported on their own, which will give

credence to our message (Kezar et al., 2011, p. 145).

Global Network of Knowledge Sharing

The final aspect of this grassroots initiative, there needs to be a unity of action and sharing of knowledge across the Air Force. Therefore, a website, forum or some kind of community of practice needs to be formed to allow the dispersed groups to virtually get together and share ideas. Such a website could present the topics to be addressed and then forums could be used to report on successes and failures and to share ideas between unit level groups. This sharing of ideas would allow all those involved to take advantage of other peoples' experiences and thoughts, allowing for significant diversity and growth in terms of activities pursued in pushing the Air Force story. Such a virtual meeting place would be the link that holds the grassroots initiative together and keeps all the separate entities working towards the same goal.

Champion Current Air Force Heroes and Spokesmen

One of the advantages that the Army Air Corps and later the Air Force had in the early 20th century was the high visibility of Airmen (Vick, 2014). That period of the Air Force's history gave way to heroes of airpower such as Billy Mitchell, Eddie Rickenbacker, Jimmy Doolittle and the Tuskegee Airmen. Airpower came alive to the public through articles, stories and books written about and by these men. Successfully conveying the Air Force story must rely on championing current Air Force heroes that will make the uniqueness of the Air Force come alive for the American public. Ideally these heroes would be specific people with stories that the public can latch on to and identify with. The Air Force currently has "Portraits in Courage" but these Airmen are not regularly seen on a public forum. Military members who are familiar with the sacrifices these members make have seen their stories, now the Air Force needs to share these stories with the public. Additionally, the Air Force should look towards utilizing a non-military spokesman. Many of the initial champions for airpower were non-military members

who were viewed as experts in their field and could rally support from civilians. Figures such as

Richard Branson, Elon Musk are aviation and space figureheads. Even using a former Airman

like Chuck Norris could spur interest in some of the American public. The challenge for the Air

Force will be to make the relationship beneficial for both parties. Nike drove home their ability

to incentivize becoming a Nike spokesman. The Air Force cannot pay members to speak for

them as Nike did, but a dedicated spokesmen, Airmen or warrior with the right motivation and

placed in the public's view will drive home the reality of the mission. Without those stories it

will be difficult to reach and capture the hearts of the American public.

The Best Defense is a Good Offense

The Air Force has built a culture focused on innovation and developing intelligent and

skilled individuals. However, this unique aspect of intellect and innovation is not readily seen on

television and in the media due to the defensive posture the Air Force has had to take with recent

scandals. A simple Google News search of the term "Air Force" reveals mainly articles about

sexual assault, suicide, death and failed projects. The best defense is a good offense suggests an

organization or team that is on the attack, will prevent being attacked. Essentially, the opponent

has to defend assertions or allegations to such an extent that they are unable to effectively attack

the organization. While the Air Force cannot brush aside serious issues, it can take an offensive

stance in the media, socially and during any opportunity that senior leaders are given to promote

the organization. This recommendation relies on Air Force Public Affairs to seek out more

opportunities, not associated with scandals, for leaders to be interviewed and identify heroes to

explain why the Air Force exists, why it's important and why the American public depends on

the service.

Treat Media Engagement Like an Air Campaign – Create a Media Operations Center

To bring all of the team's recommendations together we recommend the Air Force treats its messaging operations like an air campaign. The Air Force has achieved unparalleled success in combat operations by integrating and coordinating its efforts through an Air Operations Center. We propose the Air Force do the same in its approach to media engagement by creating a central Media Operations Center to coordinate all public outreach efforts across the entire service. Currently the Air Force Public Affairs apparatus is divided into stovepipes, with Recruiting and Public Affairs operating separately and independently of one another. This must be eliminated, and all public affairs efforts must be coordinated through this central hub. The Media Operations Center will be the focal point through which the message of the Air Force is propagated, showing the American public that we are "Born of Necessity, Grown Through Innovation, with Eyes on the Horizon" and that the Air Force does in fact "Defend America's Horizons." The Media Operations Center would also facilitate decentralized execution of public engagement, enabling the service to best put its abundance of innovative Airmen to work on the problem of improving public perception. The Media Operations Center would lead to a fully integrated effort in all external communications.

Conclusion

Airpower has been the dominant method of warfare ever since intrepid Airmen discovered that the airplane could be used to save lives and win wars. Airpower, and in this context space and cyberspace power, continues and will continue to be the most significant method of warfare. Further, the United States Air Force is the greatest Air Force the world has ever seen, but this was no accident. The innovative, forward-thinking nature of Airmen has kept the Air Force one step ahead of other services and other nations in terms of concepts, technology,

and unmatched capabilities, securing America's national defense for decades and "Defending

America's Horizons." However, the Air Force must aggressively pursue a fused, multi-pronged,

integrated campaign to share the Air Force narrative with the public, showing how the Air Force

has, and always will, create new concepts and technologies for future needs, grow and develop

through the innovation of Airmen, and look to new horizons for America's future.

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