Organizations are defined by what they do. They are distinguished from one another both by how well they do it and by other characteristics that make them unique. Like other organizations, military services seek to ensure that these distinctions are clear. Military doctrine plays a role in clarifying distinctions among the types of forces fielded by the different services.

Military doctrine has two major aspects: It describes what a particular form of military power can do, and it prescribes what that form of power should strive to become, by defining future directions that are at once consistent with the basic characteristics of the arm and yet imaginative. The purpose of this report is to suggest ways in which the U.S. Air Force can revise basic doctrine about airpower to make it a more accurate and compelling descriptive and prescriptive vehicle.

CHANGE AND BARRIERS TO CHANGE

In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, the U.S. Air Force demonstrated that well-trained and well-equipped air forces could dominate most aspects of operations on the modern battlefield. Within a few days of the commencement of combat operations, coalition forces were able to gain the freedom to operate with near impunity over enemy territory while denying the enemy the ability to operate at all over friendly territory.¹ By laying Iraq and its ground and naval

¹The sole exception being the coalition’s inability to prevent Iraq from launching mobile, surface-to-surface missiles. This gap in U.S. capabilities represents a potentially serious vulnerability that must be addressed through a number of initiatives.
forces bare to observation and attack from the air, and by effectively exploiting this situation, coalition forces were able to prevent the Iraqis from regaining the initiative. Over a five-week period, the coalition forces also reduced Iraqi combat capabilities and war-making potential to such a degree that the coalition could accomplish its remaining objectives vis-à-vis Iraq in minimal time and with low risk of casualties.

In short, the world witnessed the fruits of decades of investment in intensive training and in new capabilities for battlefield surveillance, battle management, stealth, precision weapons, and other aspects of air operations. The result was a dramatic—indeed, revolutionary—improvement in the capabilities of air forces to locate, identify, engage, and attack a wide range of enemy assets and forces. These developments should have profound implications for the conduct of joint military operations. Yet, more than six years after Desert Storm, one finds little evidence of fundamental change in joint planning, force assessment, force structure, or resource allocation within the U.S. Department of Defense. This suggests that, despite the evidence of recent history, many in the defense community lack a clear appreciation of airpower's capabilities and potential.

There are many reasons for this, but one contributing factor is what the private sector would call poor marketing: The Air Force itself has made it easier for others to overlook, avoid, or dismiss the significance of the growth in airpower's capabilities by ineffectively articulating the case that these new capabilities should prompt a new approach to some forms of military operations. While it is hard to find an operator in the U.S. Air Force who is not highly skilled at his or her craft, it is almost as hard to find Air Force documents and statements that reflect in simple terms the true operational capabilities of modern airpower or that promulgate a doctrine that appeals to a joint audience. In short, the Air Force has not told the story of modern airpower in a clear, compelling way to the larger defense community.

**A CHALLENGE FROM THE CHIEF OF STAFF**

In a seminal speech, Gen Ronald Fogleman, then Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, laid out what amounts to an outline of a new doctrine developed by the Air Force. He observed that the United States is
“on the verge of introducing a new American way of war.”² This new approach to warfare, he declared, was based on the emergence of modern weapon systems with extended range and increased lethality, as well as new means of surveillance, assessment, and battle management. Together, these capabilities make it possible to transition from a concept of annihilation and attrition warfare that places thousands of young Americans at risk in brute, force-on-force conflicts to a concept that . . . seeks to directly attack the enemy’s strategic and tactical centers of gravity.

For a host of reasons, such a strategy for warfare is well suited to the national security needs of this nation. Given the right investments, U.S. leaders will, in many situations, be able to achieve national objectives quickly and decisively, without risking heavy U.S. casualties or major damage to civilian populations and infrastructure. And to the extent that such capabilities can be moved rapidly to where they are needed, the United States will be able to project power abroad rapidly and thus avoid the expense of stationing large formations overseas on a permanent basis.

Significantly, General Fogleman noted that the centers of gravity targeted in this new approach to warfare would generally include:

- the leadership elite;
- command and control;
- internal security mechanisms;
- war production capability; and
- one, some, or all branches of its armed forces—in short, an enemy’s ability to effectively wage war [emphasis added].

Air forces, which are by their nature highly mobile and are acquiring more accurate and lethal weapons, are the forces best suited to playing the leading role in this strategy. These types of forces are increasingly capable of attacking these centers of gravity effectively. In short, we are entering an era in which the air forces of the United States have a growing potential to seize control quickly and effectively over the operations of enemy forces and assets in all other

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mediums. Because of this, as General Fogleman has observed, “airpower has... changed the American way of war.”

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The central premise of this report is that basic doctrine, as set forth by the U.S. Air Force in current and draft documents, is not well suited to providing a basis for understanding, developing, or advocating the role of airpower in the new American way of war General Fogleman outlined. Specifically, current doctrinal statements by the Air Force too often fail to define convincingly the missions and operational objectives in which air forces can and should play a dominant role. Further, current doctrine constrains airmen from thinking expansively about how they might play a greater role in missions traditionally relegated to surface forces.

For example, the Air Force's basic doctrine identifies its six “core competencies” as air and space superiority, global attack, precision engagement, information superiority, rapid global mobility, and agile combat support. Given this list, it is difficult to find a doctrinal basis for advocating airpower on the basis of fulfilling the encompassing strategy General Fogleman envisioned.

General Fogleman sees airpower emerging as a force capable of dominating operations in virtually all dimensions of theater warfare—land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace. Yet, in its basic doctrine, the Air Force seems content to accept a minor or supporting role for airpower in countering the enemy’s operations on land and sea. After all, if “air superiority” and “space superiority” are core competencies of the Air Force, then, by extension, “land superiority” and “maritime superiority” must be the provinces (competencies) of the Army and the Navy, respectively. Thus, by implication, the Air Force, through its statements of doctrine, constrains airpower from playing a more encompassing role in other domains.

Another shortcoming of current Air Force doctrine is that it runs counter to the spirit of the most important source of service responsibilities and authorities: Title 10 of the U.S. Code. Title 10—better

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known as the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986—does not assign roles or missions to the military departments. Rather, it charges each service with the responsibility to develop military capabilities that "fulfill (to the maximum extent practicable) the current and future operational requirements of the unified and specified combatant commands." This suggests that the roles the forces of any military service play are not determined on the basis of some a priori doctrinal claim or official demarcation but rather are "up for grabs," in the sense that these roles will be determined according to the operational relevance of the capabilities different types of forces offer. Thus, forms of military power and, by extension, the military services themselves, must earn roles within missions assigned to combatant commanders on the basis of the capabilities the types of forces each service offers. This is distinct from services claiming roles and missions for their forces on the basis of doctrinal pronouncements or listings of "core competencies."

Title 10 recognizes explicitly that the services must compete for roles in missions and do so by fielding force elements that provide the most relevant, effective, and affordable capabilities to users—the combatant commanders. By conceptually cutting airpower out of the running for a dominant role in controlling the operations of enemy forces on the surface, current Air Force doctrine fails to position USAF forces favorably in this competition. Yet, airpower in general and USAF force elements in particular are, in reality, acquiring capabilities that will increase their ability to control the operations of enemy forces on land and at sea.

This report seeks to remedy these shortcomings by recommending a new approach to formulating basic doctrine about airpower. The approach advocated here

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4See Title 10, U. S. Code, Section 3013 for the Army, 5013 for the Navy, and 8013 for the Air Force.

5Our approach adheres to the principle that the leaders of the Air Force assume an active and leading role in defining the doctrine that establishes the role of airpower in advancing and protecting the interests of the United States. This approach is more encompassing than defining "Air Force doctrine." We are defining doctrine developed by the Air Force that applies to basic characteristics of airpower, not Air Force doctrine that applies only to forces fielded by the USAF.
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- supports an expansive concept of the potential roles of airpower in future operations
- is consistent with the letter and spirit of Title 10
- lends itself readily to operationally oriented assessments and comparisons of the capabilities and limitations of all types of forces, including those the Air Force provides.

In combination, these features of the approach outlined here make it far better suited than existing doctrine to supporting the role of airpower in a new American way of war.