

Test and Evaluation Facilities and Capabilities

Is the Air Force Overinvested?

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In 2006, the Department of Defense (DoD) asked the services to help find resources for urgent recapitalization projects. The Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) thought it could save nearly \$400 million by streamlining some of its test and evaluation (T&E) facilities and capabilities.

The proposal would limit the amount of testing that could be done at Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), Florida, by moving the 46th Test Wing and consolidating it with the 412th Test Wing at Edwards AFB, California. AFMC's plan would also affect a number of test facilities at Eglin and other locations.

Not surprisingly, this move raised concerns among a broad set of interested parties, and it became clear that a second look at the potential consequences was in order. When Congress called for further study of the AFMC proposal, the Air Force asked RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) to perform the analysis.

Some, but Not All, Proposed Changes Have Merit

In general, PAF found that the consolidation of the 46th and 412th Test Wings could yield substantial cost savings. Much of the savings would accrue from reductions in personnel. Additional consequences, however, needed to be factored in for the move to be practicable:

- The 46th Test Wing and the 53rd Wing currently share a maintenance function. Providing maintenance services to these activities would have to be addressed so that neither wing would suffer.
- The consolidation would both reduce the amount of open-air (flying) aircraft testing done at Eglin AFB and increase the amount done at Edwards AFB. It would, moreover, also require pressing the West Coast naval facilities at Point Mugu and China Lake, California, into service.
- Several of the facilities AFMC had proposed for closure offer unique capabilities, and replacing them would be unrealistic.
- Some Eglin facilities that support open-air testing also conduct ground-based activities, such as testing munitions and security systems. PAF identified eight facilities that the Air Force should either keep open or consider transferring to other services because of service-specific needs.

The Air Force and DoD Should Take a Broad, Strategic Look at T&E

Implementing the AFMC proposal involves a fair amount of risk. Schedule delays for program testing, increased customer costs, and decreased T&E capacity are all possible. The Air Force should gather more information so that it can minimize these risks and increase its understanding of how the realignment plan would affect customers, test organizations, and DoD.

The Air Force and DoD have since taken steps in this direction. Along with PAF's cost-benefit analysis, these studies will enable the Air Force to proceed with cost-saving measures without sacrificing the high-quality T&E functions that are essential to modernizing U.S. military capabilities. ■

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Cost-Benefit Analysis
of the 2006 Air Force
Materiel Command
Test and Evaluation
Proposal

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