

U.S. Space Force Personnel Role Distinctions

Differentiating Between Officer, Enlisted, and Civilian

EMMI YONEKURA, SAMANTHA E. DINICOLA, SEAN MANN, KELLY ATKINSON, PAUL SCHAFFNER

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ISSUE

When the U.S. Space Force (USSF) was stood up, USSF personnel were identified primarily because of their broad responsibility for space missions without predetermined consideration for how types of personnel would be used within this new collective whole. The issue this report focuses on is how the service is differentiating between the roles of military and civilian personnel and between those of officers and enlisted personnel. In the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) military services, personnel management for officers and enlisted personnel has traditionally proceeded along separate tracks; however, the demarcation between officers and enlisted guardians in the USSF is less distinct. The roles of civilians and contractors in DoD have evolved, and they currently play a large role in the USSF. The objective of this research was to characterize how the USSF distinguishes between the roles of military and civilian personnel, as well as between officers and enlisted personnel, and to outline considerations for potential future differentiation.



APPROACH

We first examined how the USSF was using its personnel and whether the current state of the workforce presented challenges for accomplishing USSF missions in the operational community. To conduct this research, we integrated findings from a review of relevant DoD and Department of the Air Force (DAF) policy and guidance, an assessment of unit manning data from the Manpower Programming and Execution System, interviews with stakeholders across the USSF, and focus groups with USSF Space Delta 8 and Space Delta 7 personnel. We then considered options for addressing those challenges by organizing our findings into the as-is picture and comparing it with potential ways to differentiate personnel roles.



KEY FINDINGS

- USSF leadership and individual guardians need better clarity of and rationale behind roles assigned to officers, enlisted personnel, and civilians.
- Some operational units, such as the 53rd Space Operations Squadron and the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance squadrons in Space Delta 7, have a clear, traditional delineation between officers and enlisted personnel.

- Some operational units, such as the 10th Space Operations Squadron, the 53rd Space Operations Squadron, and the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance squadrons in Space Delta 7, also have a relatively clear use of civilians.
- Manning decisions based on differentiated roles will require balancing many, sometimes competing, considerations: budget; caps on military personnel; the need for 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year mission assurance in some USSF missions; sustainment of the military personnel pool; the eight-crew requirement for the Space Force Generation model; unit structure; personnel development pathways; and restrictions on civilian roles.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assessing personnel roles using a defined rubric of roles and responsibilities with associated guidelines could help the USSF more clearly delineate how it will use officer, enlisted, and civilian personnel while maintaining the desired workforce flexibility. Our suggested rubric provides a menu of options to enhance flexibility for achieving a balance among competing considerations.
- The USSF should consider comparing different personnel mixes either by (1) using a demonstration program with selected units or (2) leveraging the different units the USSF already has with different personnel role distinctions as natural experiments for comparison.
- The USSF should consider what adjustments to officer, enlisted, and civilian personnel roles would ease the transition to a future likely to have increased automation and fewer required personnel.

RUBRIC WITH A SUGGESTED MENU OF FUTURE OPTIONS

Assessing personnel roles using a defined rubric of roles and responsibilities with associated guidelines could help the USSF more clearly delineate how it will use officer, enlisted, and civilian personnel while maintaining the desired workforce flexibility. This suggested rubric provides a menu of options to enhance flexibility for achieving a balance among competing considerations.

Areas of Responsibility	Officers		Enlisted		Nonmilitary	
	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Civilians	Contractors
Organizational leadership	●	●	○	●	●	○
Operational command	●	●	○	●	○	○
Strategic planning	●	●	○	●	●	○
Wartime oversight	●	●	○	●	●	○
Execute ops tasks (NUDET, COMSEC)	●	○	●	●	●	○
Execute ops tasks (other)	○	○	●	●	●	●
Deploy	●	●	●	●	●	○
Tactical expertise	●	●	●	●	●	○
Equipment custody	●	●	●	●	●	○
Technical systems expertise	○	○	●	●	●	●
Administration/human resources	○	○	○	●	●	○
Facilities support	○	○	○	○	●	●
System support	○	○	○	●	●	●

- Currently fills positions
- Does not currently fill positions
- Does not currently but could fill positions
- Currently fills positions but may not be best practice

SOURCE: Analysis of interview and focus group data, manpower documents, and USSF and DAF guidance (Air Force Instruction 1-1, 2023; Air Force Instruction 36-3701, 2010; Space Doctrine Publication 1-0, 2022; Space Operations Command, 2023; DAF, 2022; USSF, 2020; USSF, 2021).

NOTE: COMSEC = communications security; NUDET = nuclear detonation; ops = operations.



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