FEATURE

The Officer Corps and Profession

By BRIAN J. COLLINS

Much has changed in the 50 years since Samuel Huntington wrote *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. The prospect of a large standing army in peacetime is no longer viewed as an aberration but as the normal state of affairs. Furthermore, this force is no longer conscript-based, but totally professional; Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines are all volunteers, adequately paid, and many serve full careers through retirement.

Despite the shift away from a manpower system based on civilian-soldiers serving short enlistments, the officer corps is not viewed as a threat to society. In fact, the military is frequently listed as one of the most trustworthy institutions in the country. Although this is the product of the officer corps' and society's acceptance of Huntington's argument, his model remains trapped in time; it does not allow for adaptation of the officer corps as the world changes. In addition, Huntington's model does not account for Service differences and inter-Service rivalry since it treats the Services as monolithic. It also does not explain why the Air Force added the concept of fighting in cyberspace to its mission statement in December 2005.

It is important to have a working model of profession for the officer corps because neither society nor the officer corps is enamored with the implications of the alternatives. Modern states monopolize organized violence and delegate this function to restricted groups. Since these groups perform a vital function and must remain obedient to the state, using bureaucratic politics or business models to explain or normalize their behavior runs the risk of indicating that bureaucratic or business grounds might be sufficient justification to alter this subordination to the state and/or society. The professional perspective, on the other hand, reinforces the contractual nature between the profession and society.

Furthermore, studies of the military based on bureaucratic perspectives meet with minimal acceptance in military circles. For example, Air Force officers do not see themselves as bureaucrats engaged in daily struggles to gain a bit more political power or resources here, while defending against Army or Navy encroachments there. Although some higher-level staff jobs certainly deal with Congress, the Department of Defense bureaucracy, and contentious issues of inter-Service rivalry, the focus of officership is *war*: preparing for war, conducting war, and making life and death decisions under battle conditions. The officer corps sees itself as a profession, not a bureaucracy. It is a calling. Officers do not join the military for personal gain or to amass political power, and their tenures in senior leadership positions are too short to enable them to wield any power that they might gain. Instead, many would say that officers are part of the traditional profession of arms, whose members have taken on the obligation of defending the Nation.

That profession develops new fields of expertise to maintain its relevancy in the face of the changing character and nature of warfare, and the officer corps' composition changes as its expertise changes. The primary motivations for these changes are the responsibilities inherent in the

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Time for a New Model

profession's contract with society. The general public perceives itself to have a stake in the officer corps' composition, and this is more than an abstract or passing interest. A failure of the officer corps to defend the state would have major repercussions. Consequently, major adjustments in professional expertise require society's acceptance in the form of an award of jurisdiction over a specific competency to one or more professions.

We begin with the traditional works on concepts of profession within the military—Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* and Morris Janowitz's *The Professional Soldier*—to establish the foundation of military officership as a profession. We then turn to Andrew Abbott's *The System of Professions*, paying particular attention to his major concept that professions are dynamic, competitive, and evolving in a world of changing jurisdictions. The resulting descriptive model of profession provides a new perspective for studying the evolution, or transformation, within the individual Service officer corps, inter-Service competition, as well as changing concepts of war and combatants.

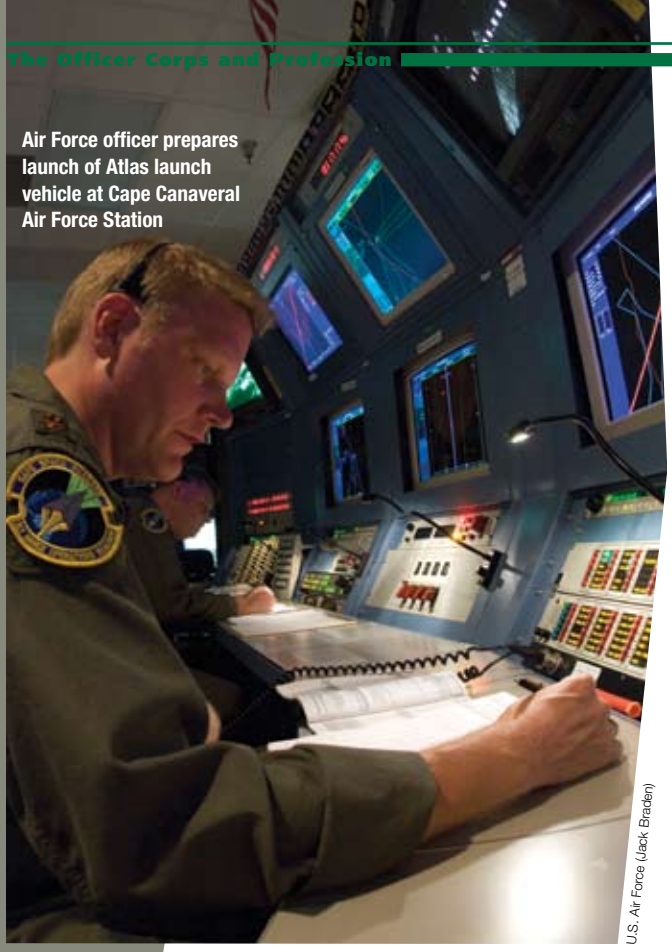
Samuel Huntington

The Soldier and the State is the classic beginning for discussions on the issue of profession and the post–World War II military. Huntington's book was first published in 1957, 10 years into the history of the independent Air Force. It would not be a stretch to say that all officers are familiar with Huntington's definition of a profession involving expertise, responsibility, and corporateness, and that the military's expertise is the management of violence. The division of profession into three points appears almost tailor-made to match traditional military briefing techniques used at places such as the Service academies and in the various levels of professional military education. No American military officer would disagree with Huntington's statement that "the modern officer corps is a professional body, and the modern military officer is a professional man."[1]

Huntington's three points provide a good structural basis for the descriptive model on officership as a profession. *Expertise* is the profession's peculiar knowledge and skill. It is what the profession knows, teaches, and thinks that it can do. *Responsibility* captures both a sense of higher calling in the rather nebulous ideal of defending the Nation by forfeiting one's life if necessary as well as an agreement of sorts to provide that service if called upon. It is why the profession does what it does. *Corporateness* concerns who makes up the profession and how the member and profession as a whole are regu-

A Predator UAS takes off at Balad Air Force base in iraq

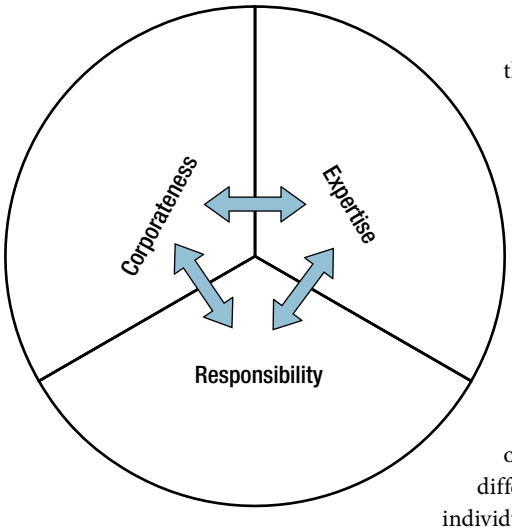
U.S. Air Force (Andrew Oquendo)



Air Force officer prepares launch of Atlas launch vehicle at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station

U.S. Air Force (Jack Braden)

Figure 1. Huntington as the Basis of the Descriptive Model



lated. Finally, although Huntington treats each point in isolation and in the seemingly static early Cold War situation, there must be significant interplay between the three concepts. Modifying one surely affects the others.

For example, society might say that it wants the military not only to manage violence abroad but also to provide a disaster relief profession. Doing so would entail a renegotiation of the existing contract of social responsibility, a broadening of military expertise, and potentially a modification of its personnel and procedures to accommodate the new area of expertise. Consequently, as figure 1 shows, the simple and static Huntington three-bullet briefing slide transforms into a more complex picture. Expertise, responsibility, and corporateness are all parts of the same thing—the profession—and the demands of each interact with the others within the profession. The light blue arrows symbolize this interaction. We now take this adaptation of Huntington forward to see what insights a study of Janowitz might add.

Morris Janowitz

In *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, Janowitz analyzes social and political changes in the U.S. Army's and the Department of the Navy's highest-ranking career officers over roughly the first half of the 20th century. He also includes Air Force officers as a group of interest, but a large part of that Service's history is still entwined with the Army during the period of his study. Janowitz uses the concept of profession as a tool to analyze changes in the U.S. military officer corps. He does not provide a three-bullet-point definition of profession and, in fact, treats it more as a way to categorize officers as a specific group of interest. Janowitz focuses on the changing social makeup of the officer corps, specifically its evolution from a homogenous, somewhat aloof and pseudo-aristocratic social group to a diverse collection that is more representative of American society. In fact, the Air Force leads the other Services in terms of the transition to this new officer corps.

Janowitz is primarily concerned with what he sees as clear implications for civil-military relations in this evolution, and he makes several points that are relevant to the model. First, he presents two officer archetypes that exemplify the divide he sees growing in the officer corps. In addition, he works through several supporting hypotheses with examples that often illustrate large differences between the individual Services' officer corps. In the end, it is clear that Janowitz's overarching premise is that the change in the social and political makeup of military officers is changing the nature of the profession. The profession is not static, but in flux.

The essence of Janowitz's argument is manifest in his characterization of officers as one of three types: the heroic leader, who embodies "traditionalism and glory"; the military manager, who is "concerned with the scientific and rational conduct of war"; and the military technologist, or technical specialist.[2] However, Janowitz also writes that the "military technologist is not a scientist, or for that matter an engineer; basically he is a military manager, with a fund of technical knowledge and a quality for dramatizing the need for technological progress."[3] This means that Janowitz actually only has two archetypes—the heroic leader and the military manager.

Janowitz admits that his distinction between heroic leaders and military managers is harder to discern in the Air Force than in the other Services since the new technology of the airplane can arguably be placed under both categories. On the one hand, at least in the first half of the 20th century, only a heroic type would dare take wing in a flimsy flying machine, facing death by accident as much as by enemy action. On the other hand, embracing the airplane as a technological innovation that brings new efficiencies to industrial-age warfare is clearly managerial by Janowitz's description. As far as flying airplanes, Janowitz casts his lot under heroic leadership. He then asserts that the Air Force has the highest

concentrations of heroic leaders in the general officer ranks. Furthermore, without explanation, he states that this heroic style is most apparent in bombers, which also has the highest prestige in that Service. Air Force military managers are more associated with tactical air forces and air transport, both of which are heavily involved in joint operations.[4]

Janowitz's main emphasis in 1960 was that the military manager was on the ascendancy, and the heroic leader was fast disappearing. The Air Force bomber pilot was a last bastion of the heroic leader, but he, too, was no doubt destined to transition to civilian style management techniques. This article borrows Janowitz's idea of the competition between the two prototypes but modifies the archetypes slightly. Today, the case can be made that the archetypical heroic leader lives on in the form of the combat pilot.

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However, the Air Force heroic warrior archetype is not particularly authoritarian, aristocratic, or against technology. He is also not automatically a "leader." He is, however, tradition-bound in the sense that he would stand by the axiom, "The job of the Air Force is to fly and fight, and don't you forget it!" He has a sense of responsibility to the Nation, but this ethos is flavored by his perceptions of the Air Force officer corps' expertise and sense of corporateness. To him, the Air Force officer's expertise is the delivery of weapons from manned aircraft. This formulation already shows a separation from the Air Force's initial basis of independence, strategic bombing, and an acceptance of technological innovation on the part of the heroic warrior. In addition, he naturally sees the composition of the Air Force officer corps as paralleling the expertise. He expects pilots to predominate in both quantity and quality in terms of manning senior, key, and combat-critical positions.

Janowitz contrasted the heroic warrior with the military manager. However, this study uses the terms *visionary* and *warrior* instead of *manager* for a variety of reasons. First of all, within the military profession, *manager* has negative connotations. Whereas officers *lead* people, a storekeeper *manages* his inventory, the organizational man *manages* various undifferentiated projects, and a bureaucrat *manages* a robotic bureaucracy. Second, because the Air Force simultaneously uses two different but overlapping systems for organization and leadership/management, the terms *leader*, *manager*, *command*, and *command and control* can quickly become hopelessly confused. Finally, in the Air Force, *vision*, as evidenced by both pilots and other officers, is the counter to the heroic traditionalist, although both were critical to the Air Force's independence.

By the time the Air Force became independent in 1947, its primary justification—independent, massed, and heroic strategic bombing raids—was already a piece of history, or at best a practice whose days were plainly numbered in the face of atomic bombs, long-range ballistic missiles, radar, and other technologies and innovations. As Janowitz noted:

> *Despite the ascendance of air power, the typical Air Force colonel or general had the least consistent self-image. Air Force traditions are not powerful enough to offset the realization that, in the not too distant future, heroic fighters and military managers will be outnumbered by military engineers. Air Force officers were fully aware, but reluctant to admit, that more of a "leadership" role would reside in the Army and in the Navy.*[5]

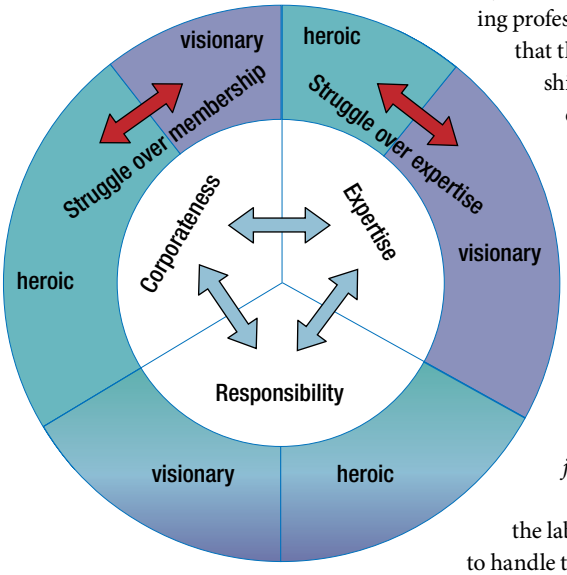
Janowitz's prophecy has not come to pass. Military engineers do not exist as a separate archetype in the Air Force. They are subsumed into the prevailing heroic warrior and visionary warrior archetypes. The focus of the officer corps remains war, not airplanes and technology, and the contentious issues are how that war should be conducted and by what types of people. Consequently, the officer corps was not shunted off into a technical track that could only support military courses of action determined by more broadly minded Army and naval officers.

It is important to note that the archetypes are just that. They are representations of particular characteristics and points of view, used as tools to clarify different positions in the analysis of the changing nature of the Air Force officer corps. Pilots are probably more likely to take on the mantel of the heroic warrior archetype, but it is not meant as exclusive of other career fields, nor is it meant to be all-inclusive of every pilot. Pilots, as well as officers in other career fields, also fall under the visionary warrior rubric. In reality, many officers probably exhibit characteristics of both archetypes at times. For this study, however, the heroic and visionary archetypes struggle to define just who is in the Air Force officership profession (corporateness) and what work (expertise) exactly encompasses the profession's self-concept; this forms the basis of claims for jurisdictional competence.

Air Force captain and Airman each operate a Predator UAS at Balad Air Force base in Iraq

U.S. Air Force (Cohen Young)

Figure 2. Janowitz-Type Modifications Added to the Descriptive Model



Consequently, the descriptive model now looks similar to figure 2. The newly added outer ring depicts the two archetypes of *heroic warrior* (teal blue) and *visionary warrior* (purple), broken out into each of Huntington's pillars. The red arrows in the outer ring indicate the tension between the heroic warrior and visionary warrior archetypes in the areas of expertise and corporateness. Expertise tends to be dominated by the visionary archetype, as illustrated by the long-standing involvement with a variety of missile types, the growing influence of command and control systems in the profession, the recent introduction of unmanned combat aircraft, and the addition of cyberspace to the mission statement. Technology has a large impact on expertise. The concept of corporateness is most heavily dominated by the heroic archetype since a range of things—from uniforms and pilot wings, to education, promotions, and discussions as to whether non-pilots are really members of the profession or are fit to command—fall in this bailiwick. Responsibility is depicted as equal between the archetypes since both see the obligation in similar terms; there is no struggle over the pillar of responsibility.

Andrew Abbott

Andrew Abbott, in *The System of Professions*, changes the focus of the study of professions from the analysis of organizational structures of existing professions to an analysis of the work that the professions actually do. This shift leads to different perspectives on how professions are created, exist, evolve, and sometimes decline. Through the examination of professions' work, it quickly becomes evident that many professions are actually doing similar things. In fact, they are often competing with each other in a particular line of work. In Abbott's terms, they are contending for *jurisdiction*.

Society does not come up with the labels and then create professions to handle them. As knowledge, technology, and culture change, professions develop or move to cover the emerging voids. Voids may also develop when a profession moves to cover a new jurisdiction and either leaves its old jurisdiction, or is no longer in a position to control it.[6] Professions may also create the perception that there is a void. There is obviously a strong similarity to business marketing concepts. In any case, professions play a role in the labeling process, which in turn affects which profession gets to handle the problem. This is a key part of Abbott's concept of jurisdiction:

> *But to perform skilled acts and justify them cognitively is not yet to hold jurisdiction. In claiming jurisdiction, a profession asks society to recognize its cognitive structure through exclusive rights; jurisdiction has not only a culture, but also a social structure. These claimed rights may include absolute monopoly of practices and of public payments, rights of self-discipline and of unconstrained employment, control of professional training, of recruitment, and of licensing, to mention only a few. . . . The claims also depend on the profession's own desires; not all professions aim for domination of practice in all their jurisdictions.*[7]

This simple example indicates that the competition can become quite complex because definitions of the work itself, the jurisdiction, and who or what actually forms the profession itself are in flux. In addition, professions may arrive at compromises and share jurisdiction, as occurs between psychiatrists and psychologists.

> the Services have specific competencies or missions, which are essentially jurisdictions that they try to monopolize

Although Abbott does not delve at any length into the military as a profession, his work provides a catalyst for further exploration of the military profession. Although he sometimes treats the military in toto as a profession, he does imply at points that each Service is an individual profession. Abbott opens the possibility of acknowledging that the equipment, training, and doctrine differ greatly from Service to Service, which results in different perspectives on war and how to wage it. Each Service has its own sense of corporateness, with uniforms, traditions, promotions, education systems, bases, and so forth. Although there is a joint Department of Defense umbrella over all the Services, it does make sense to use Abbott's work on competition between professions to explore differences between the Services. After all, they are in competition for funding, recruits, status, and perspectives on how best to defend the Nation. The Services have specific competencies or missions, which are essentially jurisdictions that they try to monopolize. Consequently, the model herein treats the Air Force officer corps as a profession in its own right.

Abbott uses "the very loose definition that professions are exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases."[8] The term *abstract knowledge* mirrors Huntington's concept of professional knowledge. The skill required of a professional is more than a simple physical ability or a routinized process. It involves thinking and applying the professional knowledge to new situations. A surgeon requires some hand-eye coordination, but what makes medicine a profession is the ability to use medical knowledge and skills in reaching a diagnosis and treating the patient and modifying the diagnosis or treatment if needed. As the use of computer-assisted lasers and robotics increases, the doctor's knowledge and skill are still recognized as what merits professional status. Therefore, in Huntington's terms, Abbott includes *corporateness* and *expertise* in his definition, but he completely

Air Force lieutenant plans intelligence mission with Royal Thai air force flight leader during Exercise Cope Tiger

U.S. Air Force (Keith Brown)

excludes ideas of social *responsibility.* He ignores responsibility because by making the work his emphasis, occupations such as the auto mechanic and the medical doctor turn out to be quite similar at a certain level of abstraction in terms of diagnosing, inferring, and treating a problem.

Most people would reject the comparison's implication that mechanics are a profession with the same status as medical doctors. They would quickly run through a structure similar to Huntington's and point out that mechanics lack a broad-based education, have a minimal sense of corporateness, and no social responsibility. The counters are that a doctor's broad-based education does not contribute to most diagnoses and that the medical corporateness has been used to create the illusion of social responsibility in the doctor's case. The doctor has professional status partly because traditional professions are associated with higher socioeconomic levels of society. As Abbott and many others who study professions point out, there is a darker version of profession. That is, it can be argued that, first, professions actually define social needs that match their services; second, the leadership of a professional organization can dominate the membership instead of relying on a collegial organizational style; and, third, professions essentially create economic monopolies over specific services that tend to be beyond state or market controls.

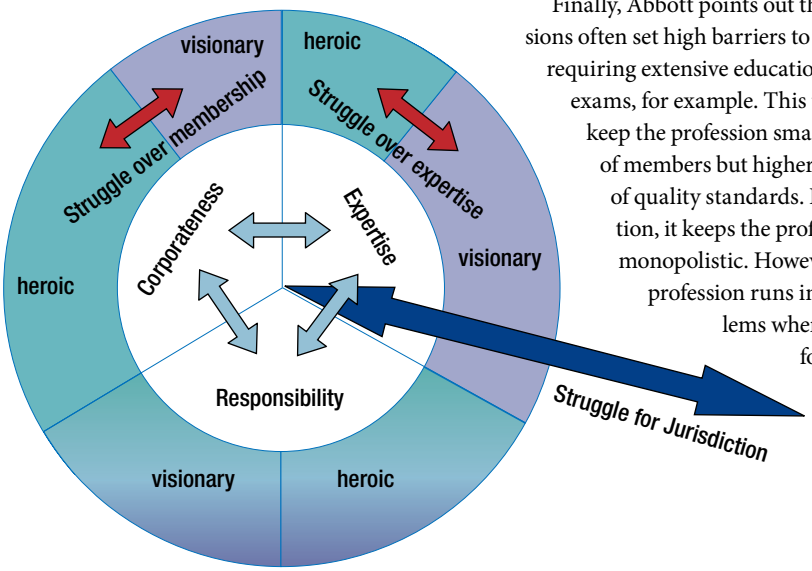
Abbott points out that the concept of professions can become twisted in the workplace. If a professional is incompetent, or there is too much professional work in an organization, the organizational imperative may require a nonprofessional to pick up the slack. *Workplace assimilation* occurs when nonprofessionals pick up an abridged version of the profession's knowledge system through on-the-job experience or training. The military offers numerous examples, especially with the overlap of senior noncommissioned officers and junior officers. In fact, the case can be made that noncommissioned officers are part of the profession.

Finally, Abbott points out that professions often set high barriers to entry, requiring extensive education and exams, for example. This tends to keep the profession small in terms of members but higher in terms of quality standards. In addition, it keeps the profession monopolistic. However, such a profession runs into problems when demand for its work cannot be met; it may then lose its jurisdiction. In such a profession, however, the only ways to increase output are to lower the entry standards or let subordinate professions grow to take up the slack. However, Abbott cautions that this has only been successful in the medical arena. Elsewhere, the profession does not adapt or cannot quickly modify its requirements, so other professions or formerly subordinate professions jump into the void and win jurisdiction.[9]

The Army Air Corps' heavy reliance on the Aviation Cadet Program is arguably a successful case of lowering entry standards to increase output, and the Air Force's eventual independence from the Army could be portrayed as a case of a subordinate profession growing to take up the slack. In addition, the historically increasing percentages of nonpilot Air Force officers and general officers can be portrayed as the changing of Air Force officer corps entry standards in order to meet increased demand for its professional work.

In the end, Abbott's concept unveils jurisdictional struggles between professions and is a useful addition to the model. The completed descriptive model is shown in figure 3. The dark blue arrow indicates the struggle between the Air Force officer corps and outside groups for jurisdiction in areas in which the officer corps believes it has or wants to have expertise or jurisdiction. In areas that the officer corps believes it has expertise but no jurisdiction, it is seeking jurisdiction or attempting to create public awareness that a new jurisdiction has been created that it

Figure 3. Completed Descriptive Model, Incorporating Abbott



Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne announces creation of Air Force Cyberspace Command

U.S. Air Force (Cohen Young)

should fill. If the officer corps already has jurisdiction in an area, it must defend that claim against competitors. For simplicity, the diagram does not show the outside groups, but they would be represented as other spheres in a three-dimensional space. As soap bubbles, as the professions compete, the personnel and missions at the peripheries may become entwined, and the dominant profession may totally absorb the other. Conversely, as was the case with the Air Force officer corps, a bubble might develop within an existing profession's bubble, and then pop off, forming its own bubble. It is also possible for the bubbles to remain intact and share a jurisdiction or for a new profession's bubble to seemingly pop out of nowhere—that is, to come from a nonprofession, with personnel and expertise to fill a new jurisdiction.

Why Does It Matter?

The Air Force officer corps, like each of the Service officer corps, considers itself a special breed within the military profession. In the Air Force case, the culture is that of Airmen and airpower, which is believed to be beyond the capacities of mere earthbound mortals to understand or to participate in. This dichotomy is not based in a sense of bureaucratic politics but on a conviction that the Air Force officer corps' visionary sense of its particular expertise is the best way to win wars and defend the Nation. The Air Force officer corps has had difficulty articulating this point of view because it is trapped to an extent in the conception that the military profession is a single, static, multi-Service entity. This model eliminates that problem and yields interesting perspectives.

On a broader scale, this model of profession explains the transformation of the Air Force officer corps, its expertise, and potentially its jurisdiction. As new technologies emerged and world events unfolded, the Air Force's missions and the officer corps' expertise began to change. The concept of airpower began to shift from an airplane-centric view as it absorbed tertiary supporting areas. New technologies for aircraft and weapons meant fewer aircraft were needed to accomplish more tasks. Aircraft and weapons technology also began to shift the locus of decisionmaking out of the cockpit. As quality began to substitute for quantity, it became more important to have centralized control over these fewer aircraft. In addition, targeting and planning required more intelligence support. Furthermore, the growth of command and control systems led to the need to counter enemy command and control.

Matters such as the use of space for communications, navigation, and reconnaissance, electronic warfare, information, and cyber warfare, that were initially developed to manage, lead, assist, or protect aircraft performing airpower missions, began to eclipse aircraft in importance. The term *airpower* was contorted in all sorts of ways and no longer fits. The Air Force officer corps is still very much about flying and airpower, but that is no longer its primary focus. Over time, it has developed command and control (C^2); communications systems; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) in order to support and manage the organization's application of violence, while simultaneously opening the door to further visionary forms of warfare, such as cyber and information warfare and effects-based operations. Communications systems, C^2, ISR, and visionary forms of warfare were born out of airpower but break out of the currently medium-defined box of jurisdictions and go beyond airpower and incorporate space, the electronic ether, counter–command and control, and cyber and information warfare—hence the Air Force's incorporation of cyberspace in its mission statement in December 2005.

Transformation in technology also led to a transformation of the officer corps. As technology reduced the required workforce and shifted the locus of decisionmaking authority to higher, more centralized levels, it became clear that the old way of doing business was fast coming to a close and that new career paths would be needed for the new decisionmakers. Consequently, the Air Force has instituted a new officer career development plan. However, pilots remain overrepresented in the general officer ranks because of past structural factors that stem largely from strategies that the officer corps employed in its struggle to establish itself as a new profession, independent of the Army officer corps. In fact, this has masked the dramatic changes in the Air Force officer corps' expertise, composition, and jurisdiction. In the meantime, the Air Force officer corps reassures society that the profession is continuing to meet its obligation to defend the Nation with airpower, while simultaneously seeking a grant of monopolistic jurisdiction over C^2, communications systems, ISR, and visionary forms of warfare, as in cyberspace. Communications systems, C^2, and ISR are important because they form the backbone of all Air Force operations today—nothing can be done without them—and visionary forms of warfare are important because they may replace manned flying operations tomorrow. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1985), 7.

[2] Ibid., 21.

[3] Ibid., 164.

[4] Ibid., 161.

[5] Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: Free Press, 1971), 228.

[6] Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.

[7] Ibid., 59.

[8] Ibid., 8.

[9] Ibid., 84.