

Purposeful Development of the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance *for* Space Cadre

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Protecting space assets is critical to AF ISR operations and the nation's full spectrum joint operations. Purposefully developing ISR Airmen who understand ISR for and from space is the initial step we will take to ensure this critical capability.

—Lt Gen Robert P. Otto

The Air Force recognizes three domains—air, space, and cyberspace. Of these domains, a war in space is the least likely and certainly the least desired for two reasons. First, the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, signed and ratified by 103 countries, including the United States, acknowledges the common interest of using outer space for peaceful purposes. Those states that agreed to the treaty forbade placing weapons in orbit around the earth and held liable the state whose space launch caused damage to another state's property on the earth or in air, space, or outer space.¹ Second, military commanders enjoy virtually uninhibited, uninterrupted access to space, leaving the war fighter to believe that space capabilities will always be available. For these reasons, an attack on US space assets seems an unlikely scenario. However, the threat to space has changed since 1967. Enhanced and readily available counterspace capabilities threaten the survivability of military space systems. Despite this reality, threats to space are not treated with the same level of severity as those to the air and cyberspace domains. The Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization (also known as the Space Commission), chaired by former secretary of defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, published a report on 11 January 2001 asserting that “the U.S. is more dependent on space than any other nation. Yet, the threat to the U.S. and its allies in and from space does not command the attention it merits from the departments and agencies of the U.S. government charged with national security responsibilities.

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Consequently, evaluation of the threat to U.S. space capabilities currently lacks priority in the competition for collection and analytical resources.”² Although progress has been made, the commission’s findings remain relevant 14 years later.

During a visit to Buckley AFB, Colorado, in December 2014, Gen John E. Hyten, commander of Air Force Space Command (AFSPC), stressed a mind-set of constant protection and the importance of recognizing and acting on the threat to space: “To be honest, the folks who work here on our operations floor and the folks who work at the (50th and 21st Space Wings), don’t think very much about these threats today because we still have a mindset that space is a benign environment. It is not.”³ For example, a nondirected nuclear antisatellite attack—the most devastating threat to space—is possible for rogue nations who possess a launch vehicle and nuclear weapon. If carried out successfully, such a strike could eliminate critical national defense satellites. Rogue nations like Iran and North Korea have neither ratified (Iran) nor signed (North Korea) the Outer Space Treaty, but they possess launch vehicles and have, or intend to have, a nuclear capability. In addition to a nuclear threat, less technologically advanced options such as satellite jamming and space ground-segment attacks are relatively inexpensive and plausible. The ability to anticipate potential attacks requires predictive analysis that enables a commander’s decision making either to eliminate a threat or mitigate its effects.

The existence of such threats will shorten the space commander’s decision cycle. His or her ability to detect and act on a threat must be enhanced from the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Toward this end, the Air Force must improve its threat analysis and develop effective countermeasures. Analysis is driven by a demanding customer, one who understands the commander’s intelligence requirements and can translate them into the form of intelligence needs or requests for information, which in turn drives the intelligence community’s efforts. Countermeasures in the form of tactics, techniques, and procedures are developed only if timely, relevant intelligence is delivered to the operational space unit. Improved analysis of space threats and countermeasures can occur by enhancing the capabilities of the Air Force’s most critical asset—its intelligence Airmen. This article identifies gaps in the Air Force’s current force-development construct for the ISR *for* space Airman. It seeks to recommend improvements that the Air Force’s space and ISR communities can make in the education, training, and experience of its ISR *for* space Airmen. These recommendations are designed to purposefully develop ISR *for* space professionals who are better educated, better trained, and more experienced to support space and to protect and defend efforts.

Gaps in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance *for* Space Development

During his speech to the 2013 Air Force Association’s Air and Space Technology Exposition, Lt Gen Robert P. Otto, deputy chief of staff for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, stressed the “need to leverage the experience of our people and develop a cadre of ISR professionals that can answer the unique questions associated with these increasingly congested and contested domains.”⁴ The knowledge

and ability of our Airmen to provide ISR *from* space—ISR collected from space-based assets—is well established. However, the development of ISR Airmen *for* space—those Airmen capable of addressing ISR requirements to protect and defend space assets—is not and must keep pace with this rapidly changing domain. If force development for space ISR remains the same, the Air Force, over time, will find itself unable to adequately confront unique questions of the operational space commander—most notably, the commander of the Joint Functional Component Command for Space. According to the Space Commission report, “As space education, career development and training in the Department of Defense are enriched, a cadre of space professionals will develop.”⁵ It is paramount that the Air Force create a purposeful force-development path that enhances the capabilities of its ISR *for* space professionals.

The current force-development path for intelligence Airmen falls short of fulfilling the ISR demands of AFSPC and the war fighters it supports. Consider the following scenario if intelligence Airmen within Air Combat Command (ACC) received the same level of education, training, and experience as those in AFSPC.

Airman First Class Johnson, a 1N031 operations intelligence apprentice, arrived at her first duty station supporting the F-16 weapon system. Technical school did not prepare her to support this mission. Her instructors primarily had space experience—the focus of her three-level training. An F-16 intelligence formal training unit (IFTU) did not exist. Instead, an Air IFTU provided a basic overview of ACC and its missions.

Technical Sergeant Smith is an experienced 1N071 operations intelligence craftsman. His previous two assignments supported the Space-Based Infrared System and the Defense Support Program. Like Airman Johnson's assignment, this is his first one supporting an air-based weapon system. Despite his lack of knowledge and experience, Sergeant Smith was the F-16 intelligence-support subject-matter expert for a recent exercise. After the exercise, he was deemed incompetent because of his lack of F-16 knowledge and the way it could support the primary Air Force mission of protecting space assets. Sergeant Smith is relieved that his next assignment will be at the Joint Space Operations Center (JSpOC) and will return him to a more traditional ISR assignment.

Captain Wallace, a 14N intelligence officer, is Airman Johnson's and Sergeant Smith's officer in charge. A Weapons School graduate, she predominantly had exposure to intelligence support for space but little else. Captain Wallace tried to incorporate space-targeting practices into local procedures but has faced resistance to her proposed changes. She attempted to have Technical Sergeant Smith enrolled in the Air Force Weapons School's Advanced Enlisted Mission Planning Course (AEMPC) but was unable to do so because of a lack of ACC funding. The course primarily focuses on space systems—none of the AEMPC instructors have air domain experience. She made strides in improving weapons and tactics support for the F-16 but realizes that it falls short of the weapon system's ISR requirements. This frustration will be temporary since officers do not typically receive successive air assignments.

As the director of ISR for ACC for a year now, Brigadier General Stevens is just starting to understand the challenges that Colonel Lopez, his numbered air force A2, faces in delivering the necessary ISR support to the air component commander. Along with Chief Lee, the enlisted intelligence functional manager for the major command, they have been successful in incorporating air domain knowledge into technical school training and even

established an air IFTU within the command. However, the fact that the dominant percentage of Airmen across the Air Force does not support an air mission makes it difficult to incorporate necessary air domain knowledge into ISR technical training and career-field education and training. Brigadier General Stevens and Colonel Lopez, both prior commanders, never served in an ACC assignment. They rely heavily on experts like Captain Wallace and her team to get them up to speed on issues that affect ISR support to ACC weapon systems.

Context

The above scenarios would seem unthinkable to ACC but are very much a reality for Airmen entering their first—and many times, only—AFSPC assignment. These Airmen are faced with

- technical school that does not adequately prepare them for their first space mission;
- an IFTU that does not provide in-depth knowledge of the adversary threat and weapon system capability;
- inadequate knowledge of space domains, exposed in major exercises because the necessary education, training, and experience do not exist;
- subject-matter expertise that fails to grow because of an all-too-common “one and done” space assignment rotation; and
- the assignment of senior intelligence leaders with no previous space experience to lead their command’s ISR directorate.

Would this situation be acceptable in the air world? Most Airmen would probably answer this question with a resounding “No!” Will this situation continue to be accepted in the space domain? This question may best be answered with the question “How did we get to this point?”

Force Development

Force development is designed to be a dynamic, deliberate process that builds institutional and occupational competencies in Airmen through education, training, and experience. Occupational competencies, the focus of this article, develop through specialized training relative to an Airman’s Air Force specialty code (AFSC). Additionally, force development leverages the continuum of learning, a career-long process of individual development whereby challenging experiences combined with education and training produce Airmen with the tactical expertise, operational competence, and strategic vision to lead and execute the full spectrum of Air Force missions.⁶

The building of occupational competencies begins at an AFSC-awarding course. Development continues at the middle pay grades, where skill-level enhancement takes place through a mix of advanced education, training, and experience. Airmen

fully mature within the continuum of learning at the senior officer and senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) ranks, becoming leaders who drive the Air Force's strategic vision. Improving occupational competencies through education, training, and experience is necessary to enhance the capabilities of the ISR *for* space professional. However, certain roadblocks prevent the Air Force from getting there.

In accordance with Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2623, *Occupational Analysis*, skill-level training must emphasize only those training tasks performed by 30 percent or more of the personnel within a career field.⁷ The number of ISR Airmen assigned to support AFSPC or other space missions is not substantial enough to incorporate ISR *for* space training in technical school and does not warrant the creation of advanced space ISR courses. This gap in knowledge is somewhat closed through a series of AFSPC-provided initial qualification training, space intelligence formal IFTU (SIFTU), and unit-led mission qualification training.⁸ Additionally, AFSPC's Advanced Space Operations School (ASOpS) and Air Education and Training Command's National Security Space Institute (NSSI) offer various educational opportunities for ISR Airmen, but these courses are not mandatory. Space education and training provided by the ASOpS and NSSI are not designed to develop an ISR *for* space professional.

The approximately 1,611 enlisted active and Reserve ISR personnel within AFSPC make up 46 percent of the total enlisted force within the command; enlisted active and Reserve space operators represent 1,506 or 43 percent of the enlisted force within AFSPC; and the command includes 581 intelligence officers—9 percent of the total officer force compared to the 3,380 space officers or 52 percent of AFSPC's total officers.⁹ Understandably, education and training within AFSPC is geared toward development of the 4,886 space AFSCs—easily the majority of personnel within the command. However, the contributions that are being made and those yet to be realized for the 2,192 ISR Airmen are—and will continue to be—critical in protecting our nation's space assets. If Airmen do not receive the necessary ISR *for* space education and training within technical school, ASOpS, or NSSI courses, where do they obtain them?

The reality is that required space education and training for ISR Airmen do not exist and that investments are not being made in cultivating experienced ISR *for* space professionals. The lack of a structured career path for such professionals, as evident in the common “one and done” assignment pattern, has done little to enrich the ISR curriculum in space education and training courses. Additionally, it has not sparked the creation of more advanced ISR training opportunities for Airmen within the command. Quite simply, deliberate force development for the ISR *for* space Airman does not exist.

Further Examination

The table below depicts a small sample of Airmen within AFSPC, including but not limited to space control, space warning / situational awareness, space command and control, and various leadership positions. This sampling is indicative of the ISR force structure within the command. The few junior officers and enlisted

Airmen entering their first assignment do not receive the necessary education and training in AFSC-awarding training and certainly do not have the experience as newly minted technical school graduates. They often look to the more seasoned ISR Airmen in the O-3 to O-4 and E-4 to E-7 pay grades to prepare them for their first space assignment. However, these Airmen are in the same boat—no previous space education, space training, or space experience. In essence, the majority of AFSPC ISR Airmen are going through the same thing—learning ISR *for* space for the first time. By the time these Airmen have learned and advanced their space skills, they are on to more “traditional” ISR assignments, slowing progress toward evolving development of the ISR *for* space Airman. Very few ISR Airmen are retained within AFSPC after their first assignment and are unable to fully develop at the operational level or even approach the strategic level of expertise.

Table. Billet structure for space ISR

<i>Officer</i>	<i>14N</i>	<i>Enlisted</i>	<i>1N</i>
O1–O2	7	E1	0
O3	29	E2	0
O4	36	E3	8
O5	16	E4	22
O6	5	E5	75
		E6	56
		E7	33
		E8	9
		E9	1
Total	93	Total	204
Grand Total 297			

Enhancing education, training, and experience of the ISR *for* space professional is supported by the *National Security Space Strategy*, which acknowledges people as the nation’s greatest asset. Consistent with Lieutenant General Otto’s commitment to strengthening the ISR *for* space cadre, the strategy calls for the development of “current and future national security space professionals . . . who can acquire capabilities, operate systems, analyze information, and succeed in a congested, contested, and com-

petitive environment.” The strategy also calls for focused education and training as well as purposeful utilization of personnel, specifically by enabling and developing “intelligence professionals who can provide greater scope, depth, and quality of intelligence collection and analysis.”¹⁰ Purposeful development of the 2,192 ISR Airmen within AFSPC is needed to follow the direction provided by the *National Security Space Strategy*.

The Road Map—How to Get There

Force development addresses common principles for education, training, and experience within the Air Force: build skill-set expertise, prepare for change, create depth of expertise, train to mission demands, train like we fight, make education and training available, and validate education and training through war games and exercises.¹¹ In terms of education and training, the tactical level of expertise is traditionally developed in recently commissioned officers and junior enlisted pay grades when these Airmen receive primary skill training. The operational level of expertise can be found within the O-3 and E-5-and-above pay grades; education for those Airmen concentrates on furthering expertise, and training builds operational and tactical skills and professional competence. Airmen who are O-5s and above, as well as E-9s and a select few E-7s to E-8s, make up the strategic level of expertise, where education emphasizes institutional, joint, interagency, business, and international views. Education and training are validated through exercises and war games.¹² Following the guiding principles of senior leadership, the Space Commission report, the *National Security Space Strategy*, and force development, the Air Force can establish a career road map to better develop ISR *for* space Airmen at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

Recommendation 1: Improve Current Education and Training Programs to Build Requisite Expertise

Initial skill and follow-on training for ISR Airmen traditionally addresses the air domain or a specific intelligence discipline respective to an AFSC. This training is beneficial in establishing the foundational knowledge to be successful in assignments that dictate the preponderance of the course curriculum, but it ill prepares Airmen to succeed at their first space assignment. Although progress occurred by introducing space to initial and follow-on education and training curricula, the subject must be enhanced to adequately prepare ISR Airmen to support the space commander.

To keep pace with the rapidly changing space environment, ISR *for* space professionals must have education and training that hone their tactical, operational, and strategic expertise. With the exception of SIFTU, no ISR courses prepare the ISR *for* space Airman. The current SIFTU course is appropriate for acquiring basic knowledge, but it does not provide the necessary familiarity with space systems. A unit-led space-system IFTU (e.g., a Global Positioning System IFTU) should be created to train Airmen in fundamentals and concepts that enhance their understanding of space systems and their capabilities. The IFTU course should familiarize students with threats such as antisatellite weapons or jammers as well as prepare them to conduct a mission-planning briefing for space operators. Enhanced follow-on mission

qualification training for ISR duty positions within a space unit will further cement a knowledge of space systems.¹³ In addition to unit-led IFTU, ASOpS and NSSI courses should enhance the ISR curriculum to educate space operators regarding what ISR *for* space personnel can provide as well as help the ISR *for* space Airman understand the space community's needs for protection and defense.

Recommendation 2: Build Experience by Placing Select ISR Personnel on a Space-Centered Career Path, and Provide Advanced Training Opportunities

Upon completion of their first space assignment, a select percentage of ISR Airmen should serve at least one more space assignment. Doing so will enable them to build on their tactical space knowledge as well as provide an opportunity to enhance professional growth for both their Airmen and themselves. Company grade officers and NCOs can hone their operational knowledge. Field grade officers and senior NCOs will build their space functional expertise to become senior leaders skilled in understanding strategic-level issues. Space-tracked ISR Airmen will have a better chance at achieving depth and breadth of experience within space. In accordance with AFI 36-3701, *Space Professional Development Program*, for nonspace AFSCs, “depth . . . generally equates to two or three space-related tours and breadth refers to experience with more than one space mission or expanded experience within the particular specialty.” Further, enhancing depth and breadth of experience for the ISR *for* space professional will “increase mission effectiveness and reinforce space education.”¹⁴ An assignment to the JSpOC, the only command and control element within the military community capable of global space operations, would realize both breadth and depth of experience. Experienced ISR Airmen are greatly needed to lead the JSpOC into the future because a huge majority of Airmen assigned to the center's ISR Division (ISRD) have not had a previous space assignment. A follow-on assignment to the JSpOC would ensure that its ISRD is armed with Airmen who have the necessary space education, training, and experience, thus drastically enhancing support to the Joint Functional Component Command for Space's protect-and-defend mission.

If the investment is made in experience, it must also be made in advanced education and training. Courses like the Air Force Weapons School's Advanced Enlisted Mission Planning Course produce highly trained NCOs capable of supporting mission planning for a combatant command's contingency operations and operations plans. This planning course, which is primarily air platform-centric, should incorporate support to space assets in its curriculum. As they follow that course of study, AFSPC operations intelligence or targeteer Airmen work side by side with space Weapons School students to perfect their mission planning in support of the space combatant commander. Advanced education and training tailored to the ISR *for* space Airman do not exist and should be created to meet the unique mission demands of space systems. ISR *for* space Airmen who graduate from advanced courses will be able to take the skills they acquire back to their units and improve local training programs.

Recommendation 3: Train to Meet Mission Demands and Continuously Evolve ISR for Space Education and Training by Assigning Subject-Matter Experts to ISR for Space Education and Training Programs

Education and training programs geared toward the ISR *for* space professional should have experienced ISR *for* space subject-matter experts on their staff to help develop curricula. These experts should be charged to assure that education and training meet the mission demands of the space commander. A space-tracked ISR Airman will see to it that skill-level education and training are developed by individuals with the necessary expertise and experience. Team reviews of skill-development training, led by the space and ISR career field managers, should be used as the venue to ensure that current and potential requirements of the operational space community guide ISR *for* space force development. Purposefully developed Airmen will guarantee that experienced, well-educated, and well-trained professionals are available to supply feedback that enhances the ISR *for* space curriculum.

Recommendation 4: Provide Challenging Assignment Opportunities for ISR Professionals in Support of Space

To enhance ISR support, AFSPC and the Air Force ISR community should create basic, superintendent, and command assignment opportunities within space. For example, space units should have a fully manned intelligence support staff within an operations support squadron that provides intelligence preparation of the operational environment, mission briefings, and defense analysis plans (to name a few).¹⁵ The squadron should also manage the proposed space system IFTU courses. These Airmen should be led and managed by a company or field grade officer, a senior NCO, and the intelligence AFSCs needed to address unique mission demands. Space-tracked Airmen who do not serve a follow-on AFSPC assignment should move on to a Twenty-Fifth Air Force or intelligence community assignment that allows them to fulfill ISR requirements that, when answered, provide critical information for the protection and defense of space assets.¹⁶ Strategic-level assignments specific to ISR *for* space should also be created to improve policy making that often prevents information sharing with the space community.

Recommendation 5: Validate ISR for Space Education and Training by Leveraging ISR for Space Professionals to Develop Realistic Exercises and War Game Scenarios (Train Like We Fight)

We know that our adversaries are fully capable of attacking our space assets, the loss of which creates unpredictability for the war fighter. Consequently, every commander must understand the effects that such a loss will have on his or her force. Because a commander's decision cycle will be shortened, it is paramount that Air Force weapon systems reliant on space train and exercise as if such capabilities were threatened or unavailable. Realistic training demands the presence of a space-tracked ISR Airman to supply intelligence to develop realistic exercise and war-game scenarios based on actual threats as opposed to notional ones. These scenarios could be practiced in United States Strategic Command exercises as well as ACC's

premier live-fly Red Flag exercise. The JSpOC's ISRD assists exercise-scenario development for Strategic Command. The 547th Intelligence Squadron, known as the "Center of Excellence" for adversary tactics analysis for the Air Force, offers all-source intelligence support for Red Flag. The JSpOC and the 547th should have ISR *for space* Airmen assigned to create realistic threat scenarios that challenge the combat capabilities space provides to the joint war fighter. A knowledge-enabled ISR *for space* professional will better prepare the space community and those who rely on its support to anticipate and plan for attacks as well as prepare them to navigate a degraded space environment.

The controlled environment of war games and exercises provides the best opportunity to ensure that ISR *for space* education and training meets the demands of the space commander. ISR is *the* component for understanding the operational environment, the adversary's operations, and the threat posed to space-based systems. The experience gained in these events is substantial, alerting the ISR and space communities of the existence of beneficial education and training and identifying education and training that needs to be corrected.

Conclusion

Although 30 percent or more of our ISR Airmen do not perform a space mission, one can argue that nearly all of the joint forces they support rely heavily—sometimes exclusively—on space-based capabilities to perform their mission. *This fact necessitates the need to dedicate all possible resources toward the development of an ISR for space cadre.* Many personnel within the space and ISR communities have different views regarding the use of intelligence Airmen in AFSPC and the integration of doctrinally sound and proven intelligence processes they bring to space operations. Critics may claim that the cost of investing in the ISR *for space* Airman is too high and unaffordable in a fiscally constrained environment. Such critics should be reminded of General Hyten's warning that space is not a benign environment.

The expense of investing in our ISR *for space* Airmen would be minuscule compared to the cost of losing a multi-billion-dollar satellite constellation. Indeed, space is the war fighter's Achilles' heel. ISR *for space* Airmen offer a critical capability in support of space's protect-and-defend efforts. They should not be viewed merely as intelligence researchers but—with proper education, training, and experience—as skilled professionals who interface with the intelligence community to supply actionable information that protects our nation's satellite constellations. As our adversaries' counterspace capabilities improve and as they become more willing to use them, gaps in our ISR force development will soon be revealed. Today's force-development approach for the ISR *for space* Airman must be adjusted to adequately address these threats. Such an Airman can be created only by following a purposeful career road map that deliberately develops an ISR professional capable of understanding and addressing the space commander's needs. As Gen William "Billy" Mitchell once said about airpower, "One has to look ahead and not backward and figure out what is going to happen, not too much what has happened."¹⁷ If ISR is to keep pace with the changing space environment, then the Air Force must look at

the future threat as a guide to how it will develop its ISR *for* space Airmen. It is the initial investment that Lieutenant General Otto called for—the purposeful development of the ISR *for* space cadre. ✪

Notes

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12. *Ibid.*, 11.
13. Recommendation provided by SSgt Marie L. Foster, 11th Space Warning Squadron, Schriever AFB, CO.
14. AFI 36-3701, *Space Professional Development Program*, 20 May 2010, 7, http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/afi36-3701/afi_36-3701.pdf.
15. SSgt Foster, recommendation.
16. The Air Force ISR Agency (AFISRA) was redesignated Twenty-Fifth Air Force and assigned under ACC in September 2014. This action was designed to improve ISR support to the operational war fighter.
17. William “Billy” Mitchell, *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power—Economic and Military* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 18.



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