



'Sitting in silos just cannot compare to flying bombers'

**To what extent is organisational culture  
an impediment to, or driver of,  
change within the Armed Forces?**

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## Introduction

Every organisation has a culture.<sup>1</sup> Organisational culture can be broadly defined as a persistent pattern of socially transmitted assumptions, attitudes, ideas, beliefs, traditions and preferred methods of operations specific to an organisation. Culture is to an organisation 'what personality is to an individual'.<sup>2</sup> It shapes the way an organisation interacts with its external environment and manages its internal affairs, including changes. It does so by providing context to the organisation's cognitive process as it interprets its external environment and determines its preferred response. That is to say organisational culture is characterised here as the context that shapes organisational behaviour in response to forces of change, rather than determining change.<sup>3</sup>

This essay examines the extent to which organisational culture affects change within the Armed Forces. Most Armed Forces and their individual services are well known for their deeply institutionalised culture as reflected in their tradition, which constitutes a plethora of symbols, rituals and practices unique to the military.<sup>4</sup> The influence of organisational culture on change in the large organisations such as the Armed Forces is complex.

The essay consists of three main sections. The first considers one organisational culture within the military organisation. Using this simple model, it first explains the concept of acculturated will to change. The concept is a hypothesis that the Armed Forces drive or resist change with a will directly proportional to the extent in which the change is perceived to be compatible to the organisational culture. The second section attempts

to explain the multi-faceted nature of organisational culture and its effect on change within different Armed Forces and different parts of the Armed Forces. Cultural diversity among Armed Forces suggests that different Armed Forces have different organisational cultures. Hence, depending on the organisational culture, some Armed Forces may be enthusiastic about a change, while others resist the same change. The complexity of cultural multiplicity, this time within individual Armed Forces, posits that most Armed Forces have a set of organisation cultures and subcultures. This implies that one part of the Armed Forces can be driver of a change, whereas a different part can be impediment of the same change.

The third section examines the organisational culture as the context through which the Armed Forces' cognitive process perceives forces of change and shapes the will to impede or drive internal changes in response to these forces. Before concluding, this section also highlights the situation in which organisational culture also becomes a subject of change, while providing the context at the same time.

Throughout the essay, two continuous strands of examples will be used to illustrate the nature in which organisational culture affects the Armed Forces' will to change. Both examples will be from the United States military, where buzz words such as 'military transformation', 'revolution in military affairs' and 'force modernization' were popularised. The first example is the cultural preference of the U.S. Army for the big, conventional war paradigm. The second strand is the strategic bombardment culture embraced by the U.S. Air Force (USAF). Both examples

will start off as simple and perhaps even incomplete, because they are used to illustrate only one layer of complexity at a time. However, they will continue to be built up as each layer of complexity is added. When threaded together, these two strands of examples will demonstrate the complex nature through which organisational culture influences change within the Armed Forces.

### **THEORY OF ACCULTURATED WILL TO CHANGE**

Organisational culture shapes the way the Armed Forces contextualise and prioritise changes, resulting in an acculturated will to change. This means that the Armed Forces' will to drive or resist change is directly proportional to the extent in which the change is perceived to respectively uphold or threaten the organisational culture.<sup>5</sup> The will to change is acculturated because the perception mentioned above is biased by a pattern of socially transmitted assumptions, attitudes, ideas, beliefs, traditions and preferred methods of operations. It is shaped by organisational culture. Hence, whether the change is minor or major; or whether it is evolutionary or revolutionary may matter, but not as much as whether the change is perceived to be compatible with the organisational culture. Three reasons are offered.

#### **Information processing leads to acculturated will to change**

First, organisational culture leads to acculturated will to change because it influences the Armed Forces' perceptions when they process information as an organisation.<sup>6</sup> Information is usually processed, not objectively, but with cultural preconception. Environmental data and facts are more readily accepted

if they reinforce the organisation's cultural preconception. Information that contradicts cultural preconceptions is usually discounted as insignificant, or even inaccurate. Hypotheses and ideas not compatible with the organisational culture are relatively ignored.<sup>7</sup> The result is that the Armed Forces tend to drive or resist changes based on the degree of compatibility between the environmental information and organisational culture, rather than on objective merits of such information.

For example, the US Army's cultural preference for the big, conventional-war paradigm has shaped the way it processed its Vietnam War experience for lesson learning. The Army's first comprehensive examination of the Vietnam War criticised, among others, its conventional and inappropriate approach to the nature of war in Vietnam. The study, published in June 1980 by BDM Corporation for the Army War College also concluded that the Army 'still did not know how to conduct low-intensity conflict because the strategic lesson the United States learned from Vietnam was that intervention was to be avoided.'<sup>8</sup> The College also engaged Colonel (Ret.) Harry G. Summers to write a book on Vietnam using the BDM Corporation Study. However, Summers arrived at a conclusion totally different from that of the BDM report. He argued that the Army failed in Vietnam because it departed from its big, conventional-war paradigm. His book, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, was readily accepted by the Army's culture.<sup>9</sup> The BDM report, however, was shunted in favour of an assessment that reinforced the Army's cultural preconception of war.<sup>10</sup> After Vietnam, the Army continued to discount as



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aberrations its limited war experiences in Panama (1989), Somalia (1992-1995), Bosnia (1992-1995) and Haiti (1994).<sup>11</sup> By rejecting information that contradicted its cultural preconception of war, the Army had failed to implement changes to respond effectively to threats posed by irregular enemies.

On the other hand, the same cultural preference led the Army to place strong emphasis, during the Cold War especially, on intelligence pertaining to the Soviet's order of battle and technologies, so that it could respond effectively to the perceived threats posed by its large conventional enemy. The Army's preoccupation with such information encouraged its own technological advances. It also drove developments in conventional techniques and doctrines, such as Air/Land Battle, that exploited new technologies.<sup>12</sup> The Army's cultural preference explained why it embraced information that would drive developments in conventional warfare, and rejected those that would drive developments in unconventional

warfare. Organisational culture leads to acculturated will to change because it influences the Armed Forces' perceptions when they process information as an organisation.

### **Social, education and reward systems leads to acculturated will to change**

Secondly, acculturated will to change occurs also because established organisational culture tends to be persistent and pervasive within the organisation's social, education and reward systems in cultivating cognitive uniformity. Individual members begin a process of socialisation with the organisational culture the moment they join the organisation. Those who adhere to the culture usually advance in the organisation and become the culture's new protectors.<sup>13</sup> Since most Armed Forces tend to promote from within instead of hiring their top leaders from without, organisational culture is even more persistent and pervasive in the military social, education and reward systems. It is hence difficult for members of the Armed Forces to be enthusiastic about driving changes that do not support the organisational culture.<sup>14</sup>

Continuing with the example of lesson learning from the Vietnam War, Summers's assessment of the Vietnam War was accepted into the U.S. Army education system since it reinforces the Army's cultural preference for big, conventional-war paradigm. *On Strategy* has been on 'the reading lists of the Command and General Staff College ... and the Army War College and on the official Army professional reading list.'<sup>15</sup> The Army's professional journal, *Military Review* provides a glimpse of the effect its education system has on its intellectual interest. A survey that examined the 1,400 articles published

by the journal between 1975 and 1989 discovered only 43, or 3 per cent, of the articles dedicated to low-intensity conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Interests, let alone changes, in areas that do not support organisational culture are usually sparse, because organisational culture shapes the Armed Force's social, education and reward systems, which cultivate cognitive uniformity.

On occasions when individual members do drive changes perceived to threaten the organisational culture, they will be met with strong internal resistance.<sup>17</sup> For example, both Brigadier-General 'Billy' Mitchell and General Giulio Douhet caused huge frictions within their respective land-centric armies, as they extolled, often tactlessly, the virtues of strategic air power.<sup>18</sup> Both were court-martialled for insubordination.<sup>19</sup> Both did not live to see their visions of independent air service realised. Both are the rare 'renegade'<sup>20</sup> and 'radical'<sup>21</sup>, as their adversaries, who perceived them as threats to their organisational cultures, respectively labelled them. However, they also represent the even rarer mavericks who managed to break into prominence even though driving changes that run against the grain of their own organisational cultures. Their struggles demonstrate how the Armed Forces' social and reward systems present strong internal resistance against individual members who drive changes perceived to threaten the organisational culture. Acculturated will to change occurs because organisational culture shapes the Armed Force's social, education and reward systems in cultivating cognitive uniformity.

### **Resource allocation reinforces acculturated will to change**

Thirdly, an acculturated will to change



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exists because organisational culture influences the prioritisation of changes in the Armed Forces through resource allocation. Organisations tend to channel more resources to changes suited to their culture. These changes 'subsequently appear more feasible than those deprived of funding and attention because they are incompatible.' Thus, organisational culture influences the allocation of resources more towards changes that tend to reinforce the viability of its culture, regardless of the merit of change.<sup>22</sup>

Mitchell's vision of independent air power founded on strategic bombers became the primary expression of the USAF's culture since its inception as a separate service.<sup>23</sup> The strategic bombardment culture in the USAF was inextricably tied to its fight for autonomy and legitimacy as an independent service.<sup>24</sup> As the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in the 1960s, Dr. Morton Halperin

observed that the USAF's resource allocation priority reflected its strategic bombardment culture. He noted that USAF's cultural devotion to strategic bombardment resulted in its initial bitter resistance to resource allocation for the development of inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability in the late 1950s. Instead, the USAF campaigned strongly for funds to be allocated to the technological development of a nuclear airplane, the B-70 inter-continental bomber, and the B-1 to replace the B-52.<sup>25</sup> As Halperin put it, '[s]itting in silos just cannot compare to flying bombers.'<sup>26</sup>

Halperin also cited an earlier 'classic decision' made in 1949 in response to severe cuts in budget:

The Senior Officers Board of the Air Force ... recommended to the Secretary of the Air Force ... that the procurement of medium bombers (B-45, RB-49), troop transports (C-125), and a new version of the F-86 jet fighter (F-93) be cut back and the money thus saved transferred to purchasing B-36's and B-50's [strategic bombers].<sup>27</sup>

These two decisions, made a decade apart, further demonstrate the persistence of organisational culture and its influence over decisions like resource allocation, which have significant implication on the type of changes the Armed Forces drive or resist. An acculturated will to change exists because organisational culture influences the prioritisation of changes in the Armed Forces through resource allocation.

In concluding this section and the first layer of analysis, organisational culture influences the Armed Forces to drive or

resist change with an acculturated will to change. It does so through shaping the Armed Forces' preconceptions as the organisation processes information, through its persistence and pervasiveness within the Armed Forces' social, educational and reward systems, and through influencing the Armed Forces' resource allocation decisions.

### COMPLEX NATURE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The following section gradually builds a more representative model of organisational culture. It discusses the diverse organisational cultures among different Armed Forces, multiple cultures and subcultures within individual Armed Forces, and internal interactions among the cultures.

#### Cultural diversity among different armed forces

Different Armed Forces have different organisational cultures.<sup>28</sup> Hence, depending on the organisational culture, some Armed Forces may be enthusiastic about a certain change, while others resist the same change.

While the American cultural preference for a big, conventional-war paradigm has impeded its capacity to adapt to irregular threats, the regimental system embedded in the British Army culture is one that favours adapting to small wars. The regimental culture facilitates decentralisation of command and control. Regiments often operate as small, autonomous units in isolated and far away lands for colonial policing, intrastate security and a series of 'Brushfire Wars' during the devolution of the British Empire.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the regimental culture has shaped the British Army's mindset to be adaptable to internal security operations, civil-



military cooperation and working with indigenous populations in foreign environments.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the British Army's regimental system had also been an impediment to its preparedness for conventional conflicts in continental Europe, the very nature of war that the U.S. Army has been most well-prepared for.<sup>31</sup>

As a second example, the quotation below from then Major General Paul Kagame in 1999 illustrates a huge mismatch between the Rwandan military culture and the USAF's preoccupation with technological advances to its bombers.

'We [Rwandans] are used to fighting wars in a very cheap way without being very expensive. ... we don't have any aircraft's. They don't fight with fighter aircrafts. People move on foot. They eat very little food. We are able to go like that for many years without a problem.'

In this statement, Kagame was not saying that Rwandans were too poor to pursue a military culture of technological reliance. He was saying that historically, there had been a cultural mismatch between Rwandans' and western societies' understanding of warfare. These two examples show that the extent to which organisational culture drives or impedes change within the military varies from Armed Forces to Armed Forces, due to cultural diversity among them.

### **Cultural multiplicity within the armed forces**

Most Armed Forces have a set of organisational cultures instead of a single organisational culture.<sup>32</sup> One source of multiple cultures within the Armed Forces is the sub-cultures within



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different services and specialisations that cannot easily be fused into a shared organisational culture.<sup>33</sup> The culture of the U.S. Navy is very different depending on whether culture is assigned to submarines, aircraft carriers, or battleships.<sup>34</sup> Since different cultures exist in different part of the Armed Forces, it is hence reasonable to expect one part of the Armed Forces to drive the same change which another part is resistant to.

While the U.S. military culture has generally embraced the big, conventional-war paradigm and fundamentally eschewed unconventional warfare for most of the twentieth century, the same cannot be said of the U.S. Marine Corps, which has shown its adaptability to different operating environments and a wide spectrum of warfare, from regular to irregular. Between 1828 and late 1940s, the U.S. Marine Corps had survived six serious attempts, and more minor attempts, to disband it, emasculate it or fold it, into one or another of the other US services.<sup>35</sup> This caused the Marine Corps' to develop a culture of

organisational paranoia,<sup>36</sup> which had strongly influenced its adaptability to changing situations in order to maintain its uniqueness. While the Army seemed to learn anew for every counterinsurgency, the Marines codified their experience in the 1940 *Small War Manual*.<sup>37</sup> During the Vietnam War, the Marines assigned to the Army's I Corps sought to demonstrate that they could carry out counterinsurgency operations more effectively than their Army counterparts.<sup>38</sup> The Marines' culture of organisational paranoia drove the Corps' adaptability to a wide spectrum of conflicts while the Army's cultural preference for big wars impeded its adaptability to small wars. Even within the U.S. Army, the Special Operating Forces, whose operating norm is in prosecuting irregular warfare, do not have a cultural preference for big, conventional war paradigm.<sup>39</sup>

Moving to the USAF, the Air Force is said to worship at the altar of technology since its independence. The airplane not only gave birth to independent air forces, it has also been an expression of the miracles of technology.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the Air Force has always been ready to embrace technological changes and innovations. On the other hand, the US Army has 'historically taken greater pride in the basic skills of soldiering than in their equipment. Until the last few decades, the Army was notorious for its reluctance to embrace new technologies or methods.'<sup>41</sup> Differences in organisational cultures within the USAF and the U.S. Army led to the services perceiving technological changes differently. Using an infantry weapon as an example, the Army took great pride in the marksman's rifle (M-14) whereas the Air Force quickly



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embraced the high-technology, volume-of-fire approach embodied in the Stoner AR-15 (or M-16) rifle.<sup>42</sup>

Individual services and specialisations within the Armed Forces bring with them different subcultures, and hence multiplicity into the military culture. Thus, the extent to which organisational culture affects changes within the Armed Forces is uneven among the services and specialisations. It depends on the subcultures within the services and specialisations.

#### **Interactions among cultures within armed forces**

The existence of subcultures is not the only explanation for cultural multiplicity within the Armed Forces. Just like an individual having different aspects to his personality, a military organisation as a whole is also characterised by several cultures which gives it a multifaceted character.<sup>43</sup> These cultures and subcultures can be contradictory and hence compete for dominance. They can also be cooperative and mutually reinforcing. The interactions among these cultures and subcultures give



rise to a fourth layer of complexity in analysing the effect of organisational culture on change within the Armed Forces. If a change is perceived to advance or threaten these cultures, they will cooperate and reinforce one another in driving or resisting the change respectively. If a change is perceived to present contradicting effects on different cultures within the organisation, the cultures will compete for dominance to influence the way the organisation prioritises the change.<sup>44</sup>

For example, the USAF's strategic bombardment culture alone, does not fully explain the huge technological leaps in its bomber fleets. The F-117 'Nighthawk' and B-2 'Spirit' of the 1980s are simply unrecognisable from the B-29 'Superfortress' of the 1940s. The USAF's ever-willingness to seek technological overmatch as the prescription for security reinforces its strategic bombardment culture that resulted in these technological innovations.<sup>45</sup> The fact that its strategic airlift fleet had not undergone a similar magnitude of technological development during the same period is an evidence of a clear result in the competition for dominance among the USAF's subcultures. Its strategic airlift culture has never prevailed over its strategic bombardment culture because it has not been able to support USAF's independent status as strongly as the latter has.

Recalling the USAF's initial bitter resistance to the ICBMs, the perceived threat to its bomber culture was on this occasion overridden by the USAF's cultural insecurity about its independence. Hence, rather than preserving its bomber culture at the cost of letting the other services have what



**B-2 Spirit**

may turn out to be the weapon of the century, the USAF finally accommodated the new missile technology. It also absorbed a fledging missile culture well enough to become a strong advocate of building more advanced ICBMs as existing ones become outmoded.<sup>46</sup>

The two examples demonstrate that organisational cultures and subcultures within the military do not contextualise changes within the Armed Forces independently. They can either reinforce or undermine one another, and hence, affect the way the Armed Forces contextualise and prioritise changes within the military.

In summary, organisational cultures and subcultures within the Armed Forces interact with one another to provide a resultant context, which explains why the Armed Forces accord an acculturated will to different types of changes. The resultant context, and hence response to the same change is diverse among different Armed Forces, and even within different parts of the same Armed Forces. This explains why the same change driven in one military institution is resisted in a different military organisation, while a third establishment expresses indifference to it.

### **Organisational culture as context to forces of change**

The forces of change include political and societal factors, perceived threats and technology. Like multiple cultures within each organisation, they can also mutually reinforce or undermine the effect of one another in driving or impeding changes within the Armed Forces. However, they do not include organisational culture. Rather than being a force of change in itself, organisational culture provides context to the Armed Forces' cognitive process as they interpret these forces of change and determine their preferred response to them.

The roles that different cultures in the U.S. Army and U.S. Marines played in the way the two military institutions contextualised the same forces of change illustrate this relationship between organisational culture and forces of change. The Army's cultural predilection for big wars led to emphasis on conventional doctrines by the U.S. Mission providing military assistance to the South Vietnamese military forces in Saigon during the 1950s. By late 1950s however, insurgencies from the Vietcong were challenging the effectiveness of the American way of war.<sup>47</sup> However, blinded by its cultural preference, the Army ignored the threats posed by the Vietcong and continued to employ conventional warfare. The massive Soviet conventional force, rather than the irregular Vietcong forces, remained as the threat that counted. The defence of Western Europe against Soviet attacks remained its principal commitment. Technological advances in mobility and firepower only reaffirmed the Army's conventional mindset.<sup>48</sup> Another force of change presented itself in the form of President John F. Kennedy, who came into office in

1961 fascinated with unconventional warfare.<sup>49</sup> Again, the same culture led to the Army implementing the President's instructions to focus on counterinsurgency only haltingly and grudgingly.<sup>50</sup> It is not clear if the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 had removed a force of change that might have broken the Army's cultural resistance against counterinsurgency. However, it was clear that by mid-1960s, the late President's edict to focus on unconventional warfare had ceased to receive much attention beyond lip-service in Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> By and large, the Army was able resist major changes to its preferred way of war despite the forces of change during the Vietnam War.<sup>52</sup>

The Marines' organisational paranoia, on the other hand, accounted for the difference in the way they perceived the same battlefield experience in Vietnam. The Marines' sense of the need to be adaptable for its institutional survival resulted in the Corps learning from their past small war experiences and adapting them to meet the threats in Vietnam. In fact, their experience in leading Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional indigenous patrols in counterinsurgency operations against Sandino's guerrillas in the 1920s served as the basis from which they pioneered the successful Combined Action Program (CAP) in Vietnam. CAP greatly improved the U.S. military's capacity to secure local population and to acquire better tactical intelligence with modest investment of U.S. forces, because it coupled a Marine rifle squad to a platoon of indigenous forces.<sup>53</sup> This innovation was a result of a different organisational culture providing a different context to the same force of change, hence driving changes instead of impeding it. It came without



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surprise that the Army was unwilling to adopt CAP.<sup>54</sup> The Marines' culture also shaped a different response to President Kennedy's call for emphasis on counterinsurgency. Always keen to maintain its relevance, which was crucial to its institutional survival, the Marines did not resist huge reduction to their traditional amphibious mission training in order to focus on counterinsurgency training.<sup>55</sup> The U.S. Army's insistence on conventional warfare had further sustained, albeit unintentionally, the Marines' drive towards counterinsurgency roles because it had allowed the Marines to carve out these unique roles for the corps.

Because the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marines had different organisational cultures, they contextualised the same forces of change during the Vietnam War differently. This resulted in the Army resisting the forces of change and maintaining a largely conventional approach in Vietnam, while the Marines reacted to the same forces of change with a shift in operational focus from amphibious to counterinsurgency missions. This comparative example

illustrates the role of organisational culture, not as a force of change, but as the context that surrounds the Armed Forces' cognitive process as they interpret forces of change and determine their preferred response to them.

### **Organisational culture as subject of change**

Finally, organisational culture is not only the context, but also a subject of change within the Armed Forces at the same time. Applying the theory of acculturated will to change, the Armed Forces would strongly resist the forces attempting to change the organisational culture, because the change threatens the very existence of the organisational culture. At the same time however, the different organisational cultures and subcultures within the Armed Forces are also interacting internally to form the context through which the organisation responds to these forces threatening its culture. The resultant context could lead to a dominant organisational culture being eroded by forces of change and a new dominant culture emerging.

The competition between the bomber and fighter cultures within the USAF since its independence is a good example. The strategic bombardment culture in the USAF was further cemented in mid-1950s by the new national strategy of massive retaliation. The strategy was to deter prospective aggressors from invading the United States and its allies by convincing them that they will be subjected to unacceptable retaliatory blows.<sup>56</sup> The long range heavy bombers, with their capability for nuclear delivery, became the national strategic assets for executing massive retaliation. Since the new national strategy was perceived to strengthen its independence and

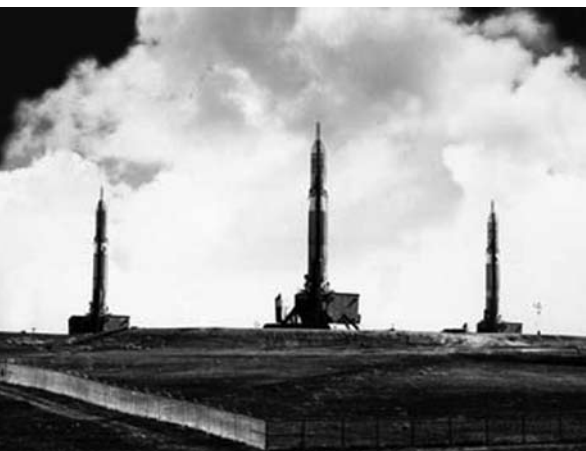
dominant culture, the USAF welcomed this force of change with fervour. The bomber culture flourished even further, and the USAF rode on the national momentum for further reliance on nuclear deterrence to build up a huge inventory of long range bombers by the late 1950s.<sup>57</sup>

However, the next two decades saw an accumulation of successive forces of change eroding the bomber culture and advancing the fighter culture. The role of technology as a force of change was significant. First, air-to-air refuelling closed the gap between fighters and bombers. It enabled the fighters to fly longer missions, carry a greater bomb payload, spend more time on target, and use more diversified tactics.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, technological improvements in speed, accuracy, survivability, manoeuvrability, air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles, and bomb payload capacity have all made the fighters increasingly capable of a wider range of bombing missions.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the maturity of missile technology led to the ICBMs and sea launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) achieving nuclear payload capability and operational status in the early 1960s. The heavy bombers lost their status as the sole national strategic platforms for delivering nuclear bombs.<sup>60</sup>

The acceleration of development in missile technology within the United States was largely fuelled by the Soviet's ability to send Sputnik I into orbit in space on 4 October 1957, the first for an artificial satellite. It led to the nation's presupposition of a Soviet lead in nuclear delivery capability through ICBMs.<sup>61</sup> This missile-gap scare was finally dispelled by end 1961, but development in ICBMs and SLBMs continued to gather momentum

as the new Kennedy administration pursued a counterforce strategy for nuclear deterrence, known later as assured destruction strategy.<sup>62</sup> It involved the capability to deter attack upon the United States by maintaining the capability to inflict unacceptable damage upon the aggressor, even after absorbing a surprise first strike.<sup>63</sup> ICBMs and SLBMs were the preferred primary weapons for assured destruction missions. They were less vulnerable to enemy attack, before and after launch, hence the ability to survive the enemy's first strike and then execute a retaliatory strike. The heavy bombers' role in the national nuclear deterrence strategy was thus relegated to that of a supplementary one. As explained earlier, the USAF had to accept the missile culture to protect its autonomy as an independent service.

As the dominance of the bomber culture weakened, the fighter culture gained dominance while the missile culture within the USAF was still being established. The technological advances mentioned above were not the only factors leading to an emerging fighter culture. The Kennedy administration's concepts of 'flexible response' and 'usable military power', which stressed on a wide range of conventional and unconventional military capabilities on top of nuclear deterrence, also brought about greater importance in the fighters' roles.<sup>64</sup> The impact of the Vietnam War should not be underestimated as well. The air war in Vietnam started badly with Operation Rolling Thunder, but ended on an optimistic note with the Linebacker operations, a vindication of conventional airpower doctrine.<sup>65</sup> More significantly, because the fighters carried most of the burden of the air war in Vietnam, they gained the majority of



**Three Titan I intercontinental ballistic missiles, iconic of the Cold War, stand ready for launch at a western US base. ICBMs and SLBMs were the preferred primary weapons for assured destruction missions**

combat experience and the confidence of their political leadership to conduct conventional strategic missions in future conflicts.<sup>66</sup> The fighter culture flourished after its experience in Vietnam also because the Strategic Air Command controlling the bombers was so fixated on its nuclear missions that it was not keen to engage in conventional operations.<sup>67</sup>

The shift in the USAF culture continued beyond Vietnam, but the above example that outlines this shift throughout the first three decades of the Air Force's history has sufficiently demonstrated how organisational culture can a subject of change while at the same time competing with other cultures to form the context through which the Armed Forces respond to forces of change. Hence, organisational culture not only provides the context to influence changes within the Armed Forces, it can also be the subject of change at the same time.

## CONCLUSION

This essay characterises organisational culture as the context through which the Armed Forces perceive forces of change and hence shapes its responses to them, resulting in an acculturated will to drive or impede change. The context formed is different for different Armed Forces. It is also a resultant of the interactions among different cultures within the same Armed Forces. The Armed Forces' will to change determines their behaviour, which could either lead to internal change, including cultural change, or resistance to change by attempting to influence the external environment, including forces of change. While examples to illustrate the arguments are mainly from a single country for the purpose of providing a continuous flow in the case studies, this approach can be applied generally to all armed forces as well. Hence, it may provide a useful framework for future analyses of the effects of organisational culture on changes within the Armed Forces.

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