

## USAF Reorganizes for Speed, Innovation, Collaboration

Written by Nick Sanders  
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Speed. Agility. Innovation.

Nearly everybody associated with defense acquisition says those are the goals. Well, along with on-time and on-budget delivery. Along with the requisite quality and performance. Never mind that some of those goals are mutually incompatible. (For example, in an agile, innovative environment, your budget was obsolete after Day 1 of program performance.) That's what defense leaders say they want.

Despite *saying* that those are the goals, recent history [has shown](#) that the actions of the Pentagon's "fourth estate" don't match the words. It's almost as if the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) is in charge of defending the status quo, rather than "moving tail to tooth" in order to focus more of the massive DoD budget on direct warfighter support. Disappointing.

Nonetheless, it seems that the military services are taking responsibility for fostering weapon system development speed, agility, and innovation. For example, Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson [recently announced](#) a reorganization of the USAF Space and Missile Systems Center, an organization that oversees a portfolio of space-related acquisition programs valued at more than \$6 billion. According to a report by Space News ([link in previous sentence](#))—

Wilson ... announced the Air Force will establish a new office that will report directly to Assistant Secretary for Acquisition Will Roper and whose mission will be to 'speed things up.' This office will work with program managers to identify bottlenecks. 'Their job will not be to buy things but to change the Pentagon rules and processes through which we buy things so that speed is a priority and an expectation,' said Wilson. 'It's time to stop circumventing the bureaucracy and start rewiring it.' Many fingers are pointed when acquisition programs take too long to deliver products, but the 'biggest barrier is in the Pentagon,' Wilson said.

Secretary Wilson announced the reorganization of the SMSC and creation of two new offices within the new organization. One office will focus on innovation. The other will work "to increase partnerships with foreign allies and commercial space companies." Another source reported that the new Innovation Office will "focus on emerging and pioneering technologies, which will free up program managers to concentrate their efforts on their own program." The new Collaboration Office will focus on developing partnerships with "foreign allies and commercial space companies."

It seems the Air Force gets it.

In particular, the Air Force seems to get the importance of collaboration. Not all DoD stakeholders seem to share that same viewpoint. For example: [here](#). Candidly, it's refreshing to see that somebody understands that innovation and true collaboration do not originate from "arms-length" or even adversarial business dealings; but instead, those attributes emerge when partnerships between government and industry are forged.

One need only look at recent legislation (e.g., the past three or four NDAA's) to see that Congress is pressing DoD to fix its broken acquisition system. Now comes at least one piece of evidence that the military services are focusing on that issue as well. The only stakeholder in the process that really doesn't seem to get it is the OSD, champion of the "fourth estate"—the entrenched bureaucracy that defends the status quo.

In 2006, the Defense Acquisition Performance Assessment reported that "staff oversight organizations, lengthy lines of communication and adversarial relations' resulted in excessive and ineffective exercise of authority without accountability and 'inhibit proper execution of our programs. . . . The current decision-making process is flawed.'" (Fox, Defense Acquisition Reform 1960 – 2000, page 210.) In the intervening decade, it doesn't seem that much has changed. One might speculate that the lack of acquisition reform success is tied to the Pentagon bureaucracy.

We don't want to go on a rant here, but we think it's past time to clean house at the OSD, to remove the detritus from past administrations, who carry the baggage of past policy failures. We don't believe that the DoD acquisition system's shortfalls will be successfully addressed until the path is cleared for it to happen.

In the mid-1990's, when acquisition reform seemed to be taken seriously by almost all stakeholders, Colleen Preston was named Deputy Undersecretary of Defense (Acquisition Reform). As her title indicated, her focus was on reforming the defense acquisition system. She did so relentlessly for about four years, and then she moved on. Sometime in the late 1990's her position was eliminated and replaced with the current Director of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy (DPAP). Notice, readers, that the focus shifted along with the change of title. We're not saying that DPAP doesn't embrace acquisition reform. But what we are saying is that

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one title seemed action-oriented while the other title seems a bit (shall we say?) passive.

Where do we go from here?

Congress seems to have some plans. The military services (or at least the Air Force) seem to have some plans. We wonder what the OUSD (A&S)'s plans are?