Multinational Business Organizational Models and the US Air Force

An Interview with Brig Gen Leonard J. Kosinski, USAF

The following is a transcript of an interview with Brig Gen Leonard J. Kosinski, Vice Commander, Fifth Air Force, and Director, Joint Air Component Coordination Element–Japan, at Yokota Air Base, Japan. The transcript is based on a 15 March 2021 interview by Jessica Jordan, PhD, Assistant Professor of Regional and Cultural Studies (Asia), Air Force Culture and Language Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

Background

General Kosinski participated in the 2020 Air University LREC Symposium as a featured speaker. His presentation was entitled "Going Multinational in Defense: Lessons for Developing Military Leaders." He agreed to talk with Dr. Jordan to discuss some of the ideas he presented that originate in the dissertation he is writing. This dissertation is for a PhD in international security studies and business relations at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. To be allowed to pursue a degree like this while also fulfilling his current job duties, he was handpicked to be a Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) PhD Program Fellow/National Defense Fellow. He shared the first two chapters of his dissertation-in-progress with Dr. Jordan prior to this interview, which she cites throughout the transcript that follows. Her initials are *JJ* and Brig Gen Kosinski is *LK* in the transcript. This transcript appears in a conversational style to better reflect the tone of the conversation, and it has been edited for clarity.

The Interview

JJ: Thank you for presenting at last year's LREC Symposium and for sharing your dissertation chapters with me. Can you tell me more about this research project?

LK: Pursuing a PhD was rather unexpected. I got a master's in industrial engineering at Texas A&M University (1994) right out of the Air Force Academy, after which time the plan was to go on operational tours once or twice—then I was supposed to come back and teach at the Air Force Academy. Additionally, I received an MBA during my Olmsted Studies in Tokyo, Japan. Following that I did a master's in law and diplomacy at Tufts University. Considering all these

academic experiences, I thought I was done with school. Nonetheless, an opportunity for the prestigious CSAF PhD fellowship came about following my squadron command at the Heavy Airlift Wing in Pápa Air Base, Hungary.

This fellowship was intended for a young captain who could one day become a general officer and was based on a General Petraeus-type model. I was kind of a guinea pig, as they wanted to get someone who had already done a joint job and squadron command to see how this could work. I enrolled in what is normally a three-year program that ended up being a year-and-a-half since I had to go back out early to resume command and complete flying and other training. I have been busy since then, and not asking for additional time to complete and defend before starting O-6 command did not help. The longer you stay away, the harder it is to return.

Right now, I am close to finishing because I completed all the research, but I'm finding that there is always an interesting new problem or example to consider. The entire manuscript is about 300 pages, with a focus on three case studies of prominent multinational organizations.

JJ: Your dissertation is entitled "Going Multinational in Defense: A Theory of Integration and Knowledge in Military Strategic Alliances." The first sentence summarizes your main goals: "This dissertation seeks to contribute to the development of a theory on military strategic alliances, incorporating the knowledge-based view, which informs scholars, defense policymakers, and practitioners on the implications of knowledge and integration of forces in seeking higher level military capabilities through multinational cooperation." Lots of people write on this issue. What was your motivation for choosing this topic for your dissertation?

LK: The knowledge creation theory aspect of my work comes from mentorship I received while studying in Japan. At the time (2000–2002), I didn't realize how lucky I was working under Dr. Ikujiro Nonaka of the Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy at Hitotsubashi University. He is probably the most recognized academic from Japan, perhaps also across Asia, on the business scholarship I reference in this project.

Although my ideas about knowledge management and creation come from his influence, really the spark for this project was the time I spent at the Pápa, Hungary Heavy Airlift Wing, when I was part of standing up a first-of-a-kind combat airlift and airdrop unit involving multiple nations. But my interest in international approaches to security questions dates even further back. I grew up in Japan, which was a formative experience that planted seeds from a young age that would

later bloom into an interest in cultivating multinational know-how among the force.

Another genesis for my interest in this approach was one of my first deployments in supporting NATO in the Kosovo conflict right before I started the Olmsted Scholarship. As my squadron prepared to deploy from McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas, we were told neither our final destination in Europe nor what role we would play in the impending conflict. Our KC-135 squadron was originally scheduled for a routine deployment to Turkey for Operation Southern Watch. With preparations for Operation Allied Force quietly executing, we first arrived in Rhein-Main Air Base at Frankfurt, Germany. There were not enough US airfields to support all the operations, especially in France where many had been closed decades earlier; so, aerial refueling units were sent to various unexpected locations throughout Europe. Eventually, after a very short stint in Frankfurt, we ended up setting up operations to fly out of Mont-de-Marsan, France (1999). Only one person in our group of over 100 could speak French, and that was the flight surgeon who had studied some French in college.

For the first couple days, our job was to fly our air refueling planes, the KC-135, to support various critical air operations across the AOR [area of responsibility]. However, we found that we were unable to launch planes for some reason—due to communications difficulties with the air traffic control tower. At first, it was thought that there were problems on the technical side such as old transmitter radios or something blocking signals from the flight line. But it turns out that the problem was not with our technology. We found out that in the evening the tower was manned by French civilians, and they were ignoring the American pilots because they thought the Americans were rude or lacking in manners and French politeness in the way some of our pilots barked over that radio. Consequently, we did not launch flights for a couple of nights because of this cultural issue—it turns out that *how* you say something in the context of a multinational operation is sometimes just as important as *what* you say. We Americans often think we can go anywhere and operate. But that is not the case. At the same time, I remember thinking, this is France and the US, and we are arguably not that different compared to other cultures in the world. It shouldn't be this hard.

This experience, along with working US-Japan relations at the Pentagon and the Japan desk, prepared me to write this dissertation. But the pinnacle experience shaping my thoughts on this topic was in Hungary, when I was standing up something new. Before moving to Hungary, my boss was pleading with SAF/IA [Secretary of the Air Force/International Affairs] asking for a cultural course to prepare all the inbound initial US members—in the end it took about six months to just get a CD-ROM on basic Hungarian sent to us. Now that I have looked at

Hofstede[1] and some of the world cultural values on differences between cultures, I think that this would have been nice to know going into that assignment. We had some people on the mission who had good cultural experience, but this information wasn't to be found on any résumé—we just lucked out. We tried to hire people with special regional or linguistic experience, but the enlisted assignment system doesn't give you a choice. Really our questions were focused on things like, *can we just find someone comfortable to talk with the Hungarians and people from other cultures? Can we screen for people who have the ability to work in multinational environments or overseas?* New personnel for these kinds of assignments also should have been asked, *do you know what this assignment means, and do you want to do this?*

All of this was on my mind when I went to get a PhD and I had to consider what I wanted to do. This was a good topic about which I had some opinions based in real-world lessons learned.

When I dove into the academic reading required for the PhD, I did not see a lot in the military literature about *strategic alliances*, which is a term I define differently in this work. I define strategic alliances in a more inclusive, business sense.

JJ: Right. You defined them in the following way: "Military strategic alliances are the broad range of interactions with foreign defense establishments to pursue a set of agreed upon goals or, more precisely, to develop and access capabilities. A capability is the ability to achieve a specific wartime or other military objective" (p. 17). Can you say more about why you think this definition is not common in the military?

LK: We have been getting better over time, and it is a kind of natural evolution. After WWII, as you know, Europe was demolished as was much of Asia. In the course of helping to lead reconstruction efforts in these areas under the guidance of treaties and agreements—the more formal mechanisms of strategic alliances—the US was also a huge presence economically and businesswise. In those initial postwar decades, the sense in the US was, *why do we need to go abroad?* It was not until the 60s or 70s when the idea that partnering with foreign companies became widely seen as favorable way of doing business in order to succeed.

Returning to the present day, partnering with companies from foreign countries to maximize business potential domestically and abroad is a standard way that large businesses operate. Applying this kind of thinking, along with some of the best practices established by businesses, to the security complex makes sense. A classmate of mine just sent me a note about a Franco-German collaboration example that will be ready in a couple of years. NATO has talked about pooling

and sharing of resources. These endeavors get at this, and they sound good, meanwhile the business side shows us that the right incentives are important. How *do* you incentivize and motivate sharing?

One of my case studies, NATO AWACS [North Atlantic Treaty Organization Airborne Warning and Control System], is also not a bad example of such an attempt. But there are some organizational issues when relationships that make these collaborations work start to become more nationalistic and less integrated. Challenges in NATO AWACS for example include the fact that one person should be in charge, and promotions are supposed to be based on merit rather than backdoor political maneuverings. That said, politics absolutely plays into the leadership structure. Some participants have had almost a secret structure below the formal one that is made up of people who actually do some of the important work involving standardization and training. So, my assessment is that this is not a very good example upon which to model future initiatives, unless some of the challenges are addressed head-on.

Another challenge related to boundaries of authority can be understood through the example from a member (European) country who committed sexual assault or some other heinous offense. Not even a two-star general in charge of the organization could say, *I want you out*. It was up to the nation in question to replace their representative to the organization. The boundaries of authority to manage personnel are harder to internationalize than boundaries of ownership of assets like technology.

In contrast--and this is a relatively small nuance to point out, but it is worth considering—in the Heavy Airlift Wing, based on the MOU [memorandum of understanding], the colonel that rotates through authorizes or certifies people (both US and foreign nationals) to be in the organization. This authority is seldom used to push a preference that might counter the wishes of a foreign nation, but this authority is built-in, nonetheless. Putting something like this into action of course takes a great deal of coordination, but it is a significant structural feature enabling oversight of key leaders that you just don't have in NATO units.

This is where I find it is helpful to think through the business literature on joint ventures, which have an integrated structure that is good for ensuring effective and equitable control. Because I am proposing in my dissertation that this model be adopted for military organizational needs, I am also proposing that a new term be used: *multinational military organization*. This is as opposed to a coalition, non-integrated, or national military unit.

JJ: This makes me think of the "bureaucracy to business" informal initiative that is popular in the DOD, which seeks to apply the wisdom of business practices to

running the military. Some of the counterarguments one often hears to this approach include the critique that businesses have a profit motive at the core of their missions, whereas this is not present in the public sector. To the contrary, profit seeking stands in opposition to one of the fundamental definitions of public service, which is to serve the greater good without seeking profit or personal gain. How do you reconcile the apparent contradiction between profit motives and public service?

LK: First of all, profit motives are not the only missions at the core of for-profit businesses. This point is critical to remember. For example, an auto manufacturer is not only focused on making a profit, but on making the best cars they can. Their mission statements are therefore also qualitatively similar, in some important ways, to those of non-profit-seeking organizations.

There are other differences between businesses and the military that are also often mentioned, the most obvious perhaps being that military personnel routinely risk their lives on their missions, and this is almost never a factor in business. Thinking through the wide chasm of differences that might spool out from this comparison are not productive for my work, which considers similarities to try to yield a hybrid approach.

There are a lot of similarities worth considering, as big business and big government are both large and complex organizations. In this way, international organizations are another relevant model. But the profit-motive incentives that have pushed the business literature farther than many other branches of scholarship make this field one that is extremely well-developed, tested, and practiced around the world in ways that arguably ought to make it attractive to military leadership.

Where my mind is now with my dissertation manuscript is considering the vexing problem, *how do you merge organizations and cultures?* In my last chapter, which I am currently writing, I make a leap into debating different approaches while maintaining a focus on Japan. Right now, being in Japan after having been away for so long, I am considering all that has changed in the direction of multinationalism in the US and Japanese security apparatus. Where I am sitting at Yokota AB, right next door is the Kokujieitai [Japan Air Force] Air Defense Command Headquarters. We are now doing ACE [Agile Combat Employment], which was unheard of 15 years ago. Yet, of course, we are still operating as bilateral operations—this is a subtle but marked difference. Bilateral means that command-and-control structures are different, but they could, and ought to, be integrated to work more effectively. My role in Fifth Air Force exists because we are not like Korea or NATO, where one coordinator exists. Bilateral might sound good, but executing in a crisis or contingency quickly poses other issues—the most critical

among them being a lack of efficiency. The structure as it stands now is, of course, the result of political decisions, but if one were to focus on efficacy and mission success, this would suggest another course of action. Ultimately, you can be the best bilateral coordinator in the world, but bilateral will never be integrated. Japan, on the military side, is leaning forward as much as they can to integrate, and we should too.

JJ: You write that interorganizational relationships are what enable alliances to work, because these relationships propel the development, transfer, and utilization of capabilities. When forces are more integrated, you go on to say, then organizational factors become more important, factors such as what you call "collaborative know-how." You explain that the organizations can either develop these skills, or they don't and fail at their missions—that is how critical they are: "military strategic alliances do not always work out and failure can be costly in terms of resources, politics, and weakened security" (16).

What's more, you suggest that using a "capability and knowledge-based" approach results in a different mind-set, and that this mind-set is much-needed in the current environment, which is knowledge-driven and increasingly competitive. You add that there are current and emerging threats that cannot be handled except on a collaborative, international basis because of their transnational, cross-border nature and include such things as cyberdefense, transnational terrorism, natural disasters, and piracy. To the extent that you can talk about these transnational challenges at the unclassified level, can you share any specific examples/stories that help to prove this claim?

LK: This goes back to the history of international businesses and US decisions to go abroad, and decisions to partner—there were many who initially thought, *why would I give away control? I want to do it on my own.* But these companies faded away, and the multinational corporation emerged as a norm. The military was in that older headspace years ago, but we have to be able to partner with foreign countries. Militaries that are able to partner well will succeed.

The most important factor shaping our capabilities is selecting partnerships with key allies. Our strengths compared to Russia and China include many examples, like our NATO efforts and close security partnerships in the Pacific, and, of course, the Heavy Airlift Wing in Pápa, Hungary. The thinking by some senior leaders on the US military side of that organization initially was, *we need C-17s for our national needs and we can't give them over. We can't lose control.* Yet it seems to me that the F-35 program is one that may have been designed especially for interoperability and partners. I really can't stress enough that we have to be able to

move past the Cold War mentality where we believe that we can't share with our Japanese and other partners. My time in the Joint Staff was insightful because I got to work on an interagency level—I saw foreign military sales, and came to appreciate that at the Air Force we had the SAF/IA. At the time, on some of the Japan issues, we didn't devote adequate energy to international defense. We just didn't take it as seriously back then, but we do better now.

Another example, not at that high level, but . . . I'm struggling here in Japan with the MPEP [Military Personnel Exchange Program]. We have seven US officers working and embedded at engineering, material, cyber, and operational flying units. About 10 years ago, SAF/IA engaged in a bureaucratic decision to consolidate administrative control of all the MPEP exchange officers around the world centrally out of SAF/IA rather than out of the major commands that specifically cover those regions. This move meant that control was more centralized and less subject to regional oversight, thereby removing the ability of leadership assigned in-country to manage local talent. At the Fifth AF, we have a staff here that can handle this work. I showed up, and I saw these Air Force officers, and soon realized that they can't really talk to us. They are off on their own, alone and without appropriate support and advocacy. These folks don't know what Fifth AF mission is and could benefit from help and support that Fifth Air Force was designed to provide. While I think being an exchange officer is one of the most important things in the world, big AF may not understand their unique and impactful role to the Alliance and critical interoperability between our forces. Of course, during COVID nobody's really traveling internationally. But here in Japan, I was able to visit Japan's Air Training Command one day, and I remember sitting across from Japanese senior officers there . . . they were telling me how grateful they are for our exchange officer and support . . . but those key visits with general officers have stopped over the last 10 years. We could and should take better care of these folks—again, we have a staff here, and we could handwork their assignments and provide the support and advocacy they need. Right now, if they are doing bilateral work and come up with some good ideas, it goes up to a lieutenant colonel in Hawaii who is the administrative control person, but it does not go to us or to PACAF [Pacific Air Forces]; so, I don't really know what comes of the knowledge and insight they are acquiring. I think this is a misuse of an incredibly important resource. In my job right now, I'm trying to regain some oversight and engagement with them.

So basically, as an Air Force enterprise, we have showed a trend toward centralizing to try to make things efficient, such as the creation of the AF Installation and Mission Support Center or [IMSC], but you really can't centralize across multiple, different regions and expect things to be culturally efficient. The result is

suboptimal. I happen to know that the Chief of Staff of Japan Air Self-Defense Force has also noticed this as an issue where we can and should improve.

JJ: In your dissertation, you point out that there is no consensus on the need to "go multinational in defense," or to seek strategic partnerships and collaboration in security efforts. Your second chapter points out the fact that the scholarship and literature about lessons learned within the US DOD, NATO, and other military organizations on multinational military cooperation is similarly lacking. You say that there is a surprising absence of micro-level studies that show "the integration and interaction at the most fundamental working levels required in multinational partnerships" (p. 33). This special journal edition includes other papers that make similar suggestions from an operational point of view, including for example the articles by Barlow and co-authors Gluck and Muhlenberg. Both of these provide insight into specific areas where improvement in the functioning of partnerships and alliances might be achieved without too much additional effort, while other papers in this volume address very similar themes.

I want to return to the question about tensions in the model you propose. You cite Joint Publication 3-16, 2007, when talking about how, "integration of command and control is a key principle in US military doctrine and is recommended for multinational military operations" (p. 20). You go on to explain that there are some inhibitions to alliances—especially the fact that the US president has ultimate command authority over US forces, and this poses a challenge to integration. You also point out that there are significant funding restraints, among other countervailing forces. After explaining these conditions, you say, "[I]t is of interest to see how this doctrinal dichotomy functions, or rather dysfunctions, in application" (p. 24). So, how do issues like the US president retaining ultimate command-and-control authority play out in an operational or tactical setting?

LK: As for how this looks in real life, the Heavy Airlift Wing provides a good example. Essentially, the short answer is that if culture is right at a tactical level, then things just get done. It could be compared to a timeshare—you have time in the condo, but you all have to agree to the schedule. The structure with the MOU is that there is already a prioritization structure that gives all authority to the commander. So, if a country does not want to go on a mission, they can give a kind of compromise support, which is to say that there is flexibility for what national support looks like in a given program or mission. In 2010, Haiti suffered the terrible earthquake, and when crafting a response, the unit had to work around the prioritization since the US had already booked the C-17s for missions to Afghanistan. This crisis saw many countries wanting to send help to Haiti, and what

the steering board did, much like a family sitting around a table, was to figure out ways to make this work so that all the countries, in particular, the Scandinavian members, could send support to Haiti. There are always ways to incorporate national concerns while also enabling operations and timelines to work—but this all depends upon a culture of trust and willingness to collaborate.

JJ: This underscores your argument that cultures of multinational military organizations matter to their success. The rules are one thing, and people will pull together to work around challenges—sometimes those challenges being the rules themselves—as long as their relationships are solid.

LK: Right.

JJ: There are other challenges to multinational collaboration in military context that you have identified that I think are worth pointing out here. You say that "US military forces often expend much more time studying enemy forces rather than working to understand their allies and the cultural, organizational, and leadership aspects for successfully working in a multinational military environment" (p. 25). The know-your-enemy approach to national security was a lesson learned from WWII that gave rise to civilian academic departments that focus on foreign area expertise, like the one where I got my PhD. I agree that this foreigner-as-potential-enemy orientation is very much baked into the concept of what threats to national security look like, and it is clear that thinking of foreign nationals as allies to be trusted with US national secrets is a less-developed way of thinking in the DOD. Another related problem you mention in your dissertation is that knowledge transfer has tended to be seen as going *from* the US *to* allies and partners but not the other way around. This is a cultural bias that I have also witnessed, and I agree that it is runs counter to the goal of maximizing the potential of multinational collaboration.

To conclude our chat, I want to call attention to a case you described of a multinational naval unit in WWII about which one scholar discerned six key features contributing to its success. These included operations, communications, communal living, inclusiveness, fairness/right to appeal, unity of command, and leadership. Under leadership, there were three additional bullet points: leadership rotation, quality of leadership, and "leader's foreign/multinational experience (this seems to be a common trait for leadership success and also is supported by studies on the importance of cultural sensitivity when operating in a multicultural or multinational workplace)" (pp. 42–43). I want to briefly turn to the last bullet

point in order to ask you to discuss some of your own background and qualities as a leader.

LK: Multinational experience tends to be a key quality of successful leaders in today's world. In my case, some of my opportunities were by sheer luck—like the fact that I grew up as a Marine dependent, and especially my formative years spanning middle to high school in Iwakuni, Japan in which I became the person I am today while also establishing a diverse group of lifelong friends. Living downtown in a Japanese neighborhood away from the base, early on I came to understand that there are vast differences between people at the same time as one can usually find similarities. I was fortunate to be able to participate in the Olmsted Program, which allowed me to study abroad for two years. Continuing on, I worked on the Japan desk at the Pentagon. This was all great, and in my case my experiences resulted from me going out and pursuing these opportunities, and I was also just lucky at times. But we need institutionalized ways of doing this—even the best companies also have to keep working on this. I am hopeful that the US Air Force will continue to do better at engaging in some of the ideas we've discussed today toward achieving strength through real multinational military integration. ✪

Notes

1. Geert Hofstede and Michael Minkov, "Hofstede's Fifth Dimension: New Evidence from the World Values Survey," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 15 December 2010. The "World Values Survey" is an open-access website that consolidates related research into a related data set: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/.