

Executive Summary from “Honchoing AI in the Air Force: If AI is Important, the People are Indispensable”

Popular visions of military artificial intelligence (AI) might evoke an all-seeing superintelligence directing autonomous drone swarms—while servicemembers sit far from danger and decision-making alike. This AI hype does not yet comport with reality. More importantly, it distracts from the real opportunity facing the U.S. Air Force (USAF): integrating AI in ways that improve mission effectiveness now.

The USAF can best harness AI by diffusing the technology across the institution to offload onerous, low-complexity tasks from humans to machines. This requires:

- **Embedding AI engineers** in operational and support units to rapidly identify, develop, and iterate applications.
- **Empowering a senior trilingual AI leader**—fluent in technology, operations, and acquisition—with a six-to-ten-year tenure to guide and scale innovation.
- **Retaining critical talent**, including the operators, engineers, and leaders needed to build and sustain effective capabilities.

While diffusion drives AI innovation's breadth and speed, leadership and expertise ensure that its depth and direction align with USAF goals. This places primacy on USAF personnel taking charge of (honchoing) AI adoption while maintaining their central role in executing the mission. Doing so will result in a practical, better-sensing, better-knowing, and better-executing force that balances time, cognitive workload, and risk to better achieve a military advantage

For more information:

- Download the report: <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/honchoing-ai-in-the-air-force/>
- Contact us: cset@georgetown.edu