

Making the Joint Journey

By WILLIAM A. OWENS

Thirteen years have gone by since passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act made joint operations and joint force planning the law. Over that time the Department of Defense has established centers, management procedures, planning organizations, and command structures that bear the term *joint* prominently in their titles. Military professionals talk and write about jointness. We congratulate ourselves on how far we have come from the bad old days of unrestrained service parochialism and excessive redundancy among the Armed Forces.

Much of this self-congratulation is justified. There is greater planning coordination among the

Armed Forces and more cross-service operational integration today. The assignment to a joint command and staff is now a virtual necessity for career advancement, and the increasing number of joint entities—from task forces to the Joint Requirements Oversight Council—bear witness to the advance of a common perspective. The conglomeration of laws, organizations, and procedures that function under the rubric of jointness epitomizes how the military of today differs from that of yesterday. Some things really have changed.

Yet *jointness* is a term that has been invented. You will not find it in the dictionary; and it is difficult to institutionalize a universal meaning for the concept. Moreover, objective evaluation reveals major caveats in the notion that the Defense Establishment has become more joint. Despite the period since the DOD Reorganization Act of 1986, operations remain more joint

in name than in conduct, and the process of determining requirements is more joint in rhetoric than in execution. Desert Storm, sometimes touted as the advent of joint operations in the American way of war, was more remarkable for its similarity to the command and operational patterns of the Vietnam era than as a reification of



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joint warfare concepts. Look beneath the surface and you will uncover the same organizational pattern. Geography, not synergy, structured the responsibilities and missions of the service components in the Persian Gulf just as it did twenty-five years earlier in Southeast Asia. Difficulties rather than ease characterized cross-service communications and coordination. The fact that the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force worked so well together is more a testament to the initiative and skill of those who did the actual fighting than to a real shift to joint command and control. And military operations since have provided scant evidence of rapid progress in this area.

Unfortunately the story is much the same with regard to joint force planning and identifying military requirements. While a joint perspective is not absent from considerations of requirements for future forces, it remains far subordinate to that of the individual services at a time when each recognizes increasing budget constraints and believes it is involved in a zero-sum funding contest. Service parochialism is still the most important factor in force planning.

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Some Reasons

A joint perspective comes down to cross-service trust and the belief that another component can reliably provide a military function. Too often the functional redundancy of the Armed Forces stems from a basic desire to avoid reliance on another service or external source. Regardless of why duplication and redundancy exist, once in place they become vested.

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Internal organizations are formed to conduct functions, maintain facilities, and ensure that these weapons or functions will be available. And the most potent rationale for duplication is soon proclaimed: it is *es-*

sential because the vagaries and fog of war demand redundancy to compensate for the unexpected. After all, aren't the stakes too high to depend on another service—specialized for another kind of warfare and focused on its own needs—to come through in a crisis? Isn't it better if functions and matériel that may be needed are all part of the same structure, tied together by a specialized doctrine, identifiable by a specialized insignia, and wedded to the same traditions, culture, and language? And isn't this the way that we've always done it and the way that has been proven by victory on the battlefield?

This is the substance of the rationale for the crystalline stovepipes that separate the services. I refer to them as crystalline because it is easy to miss them. Sometimes we see through them as if they were not there. Yet if you look closely you will discover them. And if you function inside one you are quick to learn how far you can go before hitting the side, for we shroud them in authority and tradition. We inculcate military careerists with these traditions and reinforce them throughout their lives, formally through service evaluation systems that determine how fast and how far people rise and informally in many subtle ways. The higher careerists rise, the more they see their role as protectors—stewards—of service traditions, doctrine, and loyalties that shape the crystal channels. These stovepipes, in turn, force thinking and action toward duplication and redundancy.



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The Goldwater-Nichols Act promulgated a joint perspective in force planning by expanding the role of unified commanders in the planning, programming, and budgeting system. The unified commanders, most with regional responsibilities, are after all joint commanders and as such are positioned to best understand and advocate that perspective. But look closely at how these regional commands actually participate in planning and designing future forces. Unified commanders often command primarily by defining areas of responsibility and activity for separate service components assigned to them. And when asked for recommendations on the size, structure, and character of future forces, they usually compile the separate recommendations furnished by service components assigned to their command which are often drafted back in Washington by service staffs. They are dispatched in time for service components of a unified command to change the letterhead, correct the spelling, and more rarely adjust the substance to reflect the component commander's particular bias before submitting the requirements. The staff of the unified commander, in effect, will then staple together the input from each service component in time to dispatch recommendations back to Washington for the next cycle of planning, programming, and budgeting.

Then there are joint task forces. There are a lot of them now, organized for exercises and operations. Because of them, we are getting better at joint operations. But the operative word is still *task*. JTFs narrow jointness to particular events for particular durations. That means they are not regarded as the operational norm; we deal with them as temporary perturbations, exceptions to comfortable administrative and cultural channels that link Washington and components abroad. We are getting better at conducting joint operations. Synergy is enhanced among separate service components when they exercise and operate together, and we are institutionalizing our knowledge on how to do it. But we should not yet claim victory or ignore how hard it is for components to interface.

We created the joint doctrine formulation process in part to overcome this parochialism. Institutions like the Joint Doctrine Center in Norfolk, Virginia, and elements of the Joint Staff have produced literally tons of publications that sketch, and sometimes offer exquisite details for, what is termed joint doctrine. Yet this growing body of literature is not so much joint doctrine as simply an amalgam of service doctrines. Those charged with producing joint doctrine have no independent source of data, information, or concepts on how to generate new synergism from the interaction of the services other than what the individual services provide them. They rely on inputs from service staffs that are focused on their own doctrine. As a result, purple-wrapped joint doctrine pubs are usually either compilations of how each service goes about doing a particular thing or highly coordinated summaries of what the services do similarly. Service parochialism has dominated the defense planning and programming processes up through the last half of the 20th century.

Changing the Planning Process

The identification of military requirements should be consolidated in a Joint Requirements Committee, chaired by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense, with the Chairman (or his designated representative, perhaps the Vice Chairman) serving as the senior military member and deputy chairman. Membership should be restricted to the service chiefs or vice chiefs and four senior civilian members from the Office of the Secretary. The committee would be responsible for setting *all* military requirements.

A combined military-civilian staff would support the committee. It would be the only DOD staff dedicated to identifying requirements. We should strip out all other requirements bodies from the services and consolidate analytic resources in the new requirements committee staff. In effect this would remove the requirement function from the services and charge them with implementing decisions of the Joint Requirements Committee (on which they would be represented). The service chiefs would be specified as CEOs of the infrastructure, training personnel and managing facilities. This is no small task. It involves 65 percent of the defense budget.

The staff of the Secretary of Defense would also shift in function, losing all its independent requirement-setting taskings and dropping elements whose primary role has been to represent the budgetary interests of particular groups. This

in turn would justify reducing civilian and military staffs in the Pentagon by half. It would cut the civilian staff to about the level of the early 1960s when the Armed Forces were nearly twice as large as today.

Removing the requirements function from the services would be a major change. It would not mean that the services would be abolished or unified. They would remain the repository of the traditions that distinguish them individually. But a major prop that reinforces the stovepipes would be gone, and with it the entire tempestuous superstructure and mystique of budget shares and force structure maintenance. With an outside body (but one in which each service would be represented) setting the requirements, these obstacles would erode quickly.

Consolidating

Removing the services from the requirement-setting function would make it easier to merge key support functions. Nearly every analysis and assessment, from the Goldwater-Nichols Act to the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces ten years later, indicated that there is real redundancy in the support structure but that it is too difficult to change. That has been true, not because the changes did not make sense but because the services opposed them. That opposition was rooted in parochialism and distrust. But redundancy was also justified annually because the services argued that maintaining separate support functions was a military requirement.

There have been efforts in the past to consolidate support functions. The most serious was the creation of defense agencies by Secretary Robert McNamara to provide integrated intelligence, communications, and logistics support for all military components. Over time it became obvious that his efforts were unsuccessful. Today we face the complexity and duplication generated not only by service redundancy, but by an increasing number of defense agencies which have become additional competitors for resources and the basis for duplication.

However, when the role of the services in requirement identification is removed, the game literally changes. It is time to consolidate the four great enablers of combat power—intelligence, communications, logistics, and medical services. Individual services should be made the executive agents for these support functions, assuming the management responsibility for the Armed Forces. Together with this consolidation, the separate logistics, communications, and intelligence agencies should be abolished.

But we don't want to go too far. The benefits of service identity and traditions should be maintained. Only when traditions get in the way of the purpose of the military and become ends in themselves must we adjust what is, after all, an historical phenomenon. It is the abuses of service parochialism that must be curtailed.

The age-old practice of denigrating other services stems from an ignorance of what actually occurs within them. It is sometimes rationalized by the argument that the complexity of what goes on within each service is so great and the skills demanded so high that one can't afford the luxury of learning about other services. Taking time away from the responsibility of mastering the mores, operational doctrine, and systems of one's own service is counterproductive. Personnel undergo extensive and intense training throughout their careers; but they are not taught about the advantages of truly joint operations.

Changing the Academies

The problem starts in the service academies and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs. The goal of the academies is to provide cadets and midshipmen with a solid education. Although some graduates are given a choice of service, the central goal of each academy has been not simply to produce good military officers, but good Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force officers. Interestingly, most sociological studies of what makes a good Navy officer as distinct from a good Army officer point to experience and training received after commissioning. Yet the distinctiveness among the services is accentuated the most at the academies.

That emphasis should be reversed. Service academies and ROTC programs ought to stress a joint perspective and, in particular, acquaint cadets and midshipmen with paradigms and systems found in the other services. The net result could be significant: each graduate might emerge proud not only of his or her service, but of what the Armed Forces provide jointly to national security. Specialization in the mores, systems, and operational doctrine of a particular service will come with experience and additional training. We must orient the academy experience toward producing good *military* officers.

Various study groups and commissions have proposed changes in officer education. They range from expanding the current exchange programs which allow some cadets and midshipmen to participate in other service academies to introducing more joint perspective classes at each academy to, more radically, consolidating the academies into a national military academy. I think the best approach would be to rotate the

classes among academies. For example, a midshipman could spend the first year at the Naval Academy, the second at the Military Academy at West Point, the third at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and the fourth back at Annapolis. A similar rotation would apply to the Military Academy and the Air Force Academy. There would be little or no cost differential with the single-academy pattern that dominates the early socialization of officers today. Similar exchanges could be devised for ROTC programs, although their size would suggest consolidating them into a single program. In the final analysis, we want to make young officers of every service aware and proud of the Armed Forces, capable of operating together, and able to start their military careers thinking jointly.

Career Training

The professional military education and training system through which a better joint perspective can be built already exists. We do not have to make major changes in it or in the pattern by which individuals pass through it during their careers. We should, however, change some of what occurs inside it.

One key change would be to incorporate an improved understanding of the major military systems used by each service and of the new information systems that are binding platforms and systems into the emerging system of systems. Some may argue that the sophistication and complexity of the platforms and systems which make up the core of each service mean that learning about them would encroach on the time needed to grasp the essentials of one's own service. I disagree. There is no more important knowledge than that imparted by a joint perspective and increased awareness of the major systems of each service. This understanding ought to be a condition for promotion throughout the Armed Forces. If we are to accelerate the transformation of America's military—as I am convinced we should—we must draw on the insights, innovation, and intelligence of the entire officer corps.

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