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For the Joint Specialist: Five Steep Hills to Climb

WILLIAM E. DEPUY

Officers of the armed forces have been tendered a new and exciting career opportunity—that of becoming qualified and recognized as a Joint Specialty Officer. Those who choose to follow this route will be on the leading edge of a new wave. The opportunity has been fashioned by Congress. It is the product of long-festered congressional unhappiness about the state of joint affairs within the Department of Defense. Still beset by concerns over the outcome in Vietnam, Congress was irritated further by the *Mayaguez* incident of 1975¹ and especially by the failure at Desert One during the Iranian hostage rescue attempt of 1980. The momentum for reform within Congress was given a mighty twin boost by the bombing of the Marine barracks at the Beirut airport on 23 October 1983—241 Marines were killed and scores more wounded—followed only two days later by Urgent Fury, the Grenadan campaign marked by serious problems of joint execution.

In October 1985, the staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee issued a report² which became the inspiration for subsequent hearings resulting ultimately in the now-famous Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986.³ That act represents an astounding and historic intervention by Congress in the organization and internal operation of the Department of Defense.

Officers who contemplate following the new joint specialist path as a major career option should read the Senate staff report from cover to cover in order to understand the perspectives, motives, and objectives of Congress. The most zealous of such officers may also wish to study the transcripts of the hearings. The stilted language of the law itself does not convey the spirit and drive of its intent.

The basic theme of the new legislation is to strengthen the joint establishment vis-à-vis the service departments.⁴ The most important aspects are these:

- The responsibilities and authorities of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are greatly increased. He is now the chief joint military adviser to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the entire national security apparatus. He has clear control over the Joint Staff.

- A four-star Vice Chairman has been provided to assist the Chairman.
- Minutely detailed instructions are contained in the law regulating the selection, education, assignment, and promotion of Joint Specialty Officers.⁵

- The commanders of the unified commands (the CINCs) have been given increased authority over the service components of those commands and direct access to the programming and budgeting processes in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

- The service departments have been reorganized to increase civilian control.

With respect to the distribution of power within the national security apparatus, there is the unmistakable presumption of a zero-sum game in the package as a whole. That is, Congress seemed to believe that strengthening the joint establishment required the weakening of the services. This is both unfortunate and unnecessary as we shall see. What is required is the strengthening of both.

Thus Joint Specialty Officers, and those who plan to become such, stand under the influence of this historic legislation, learning the ropes in respect to the organization, functions, and procedures of the reinforced and elevated joint establishment. In proceeding, it is wise to remember that it is the product, not the process, which counts and for which JSOs will be judged in the long run. The realization of the goals established in the new law and its implementing directives now passes to the hands and talents of a new generation. And full realization will take just that—generational change.

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Let us now turn to five selected opportunities for improvement and innovation in the joint arena, five steep hills to climb:

- Raising the quality of joint military advice.
- Improving the track record in operational art.
- Determining joint force requirements.
- Providing joint command and control over joint collateral support operations.
- Creating the conditions required for the synchronization of cross-service support at the tactical level.

Hill One: Quality Advice

The government turns to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for military advice on a very wide range of national security issues and policies. There is no higher military authority and thus nowhere else to turn for such assistance. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff are responsive and useful and when the views of the incumbent administration and those of the Joint Chiefs are generally compatible, the relationship is healthy and productive. When either of these conditions is absent, there is a pattern of mistrust, rancor, and bad decisions. Therefore there is much at stake in these relationships, which are complex at best.

The environment in which military advice is rendered to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the national security apparatus is interesting in an open democracy. Under the new law, it is the Chairman, JCS, who is personally responsible for advice to the government and is also responsible for strategic planning. This suggests the existence of a grand Clausewitzian design to which the Joint Chiefs of Staff can refer for answers to all the lesser included questions. It is not quite like that.

In the first place, historically in this pragmatic nation there has been no true codified national strategy within which the military strategy could fit as one of several components alongside an economic strategy, a political strategy, and perhaps social and technological strategies. Congress has been goading the executive branch to produce such a national strategy, and efforts have been made.

But the reality remains that the real US strategy consists of the whole loosely bound portfolio of current security policies dealing with individual problems and issues, both foreign and domestic, facing an administration. If a grand design were to be drafted which projected changes in current policies, it would have to be so closely held as to be ineffective as an instrument of government. Current policies are delicately balanced between opposing sets of pressures. Any prospects for future change announced publicly would produce a fire storm of contention within our political system and amongst our allies. And of course real national strategy requires public and congressional support, so it cannot be closely held. Do not hold your breath for a grand design.

Military strategy is confined by the policies it serves. The real military strategy, therefore, is the compendium of plans, deployments, operations, and programs supporting the long list of national security policies, which range from the defense of NATO to the transfer of defense technology and the size of an advisory group in country X. There is of course a necessity to protect actual military operational plans and to protect from the eyes of our adversaries our priorities for the distribution of military resources across all the plans. This is the closest we come to a military strategy.

The business of military advice is booming. Always active whenever a new administration arrives, we now have the added dimension of the extreme turbulence generated by Gorbachev's initiatives, instability in China, and a roiling Middle Eastern scene. And this is not to mention the budget crunch in the United States and economic trauma in much of the Third World. It is unlikely that there are *any* policies not under some kind of review, and the former planning assumptions associated with a bipolar world are now all up in the air. Even before the congressional measures to strengthen the joint establishment have taken their full effect, the new system has been plunged into this maelstrom of activity. That condition may be expected to persist for a long time. And when policies change—military strategies must follow.

The perspectives of the Congress on JCS performance were downbeat in 1985 and 1986. In the Senate staff report two comments from former luminaries on the defense scene were quoted as follows:

Former Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger: "Advice proffered by the JCS was generally irrelevant, unread, and largely disregarded."

Former Chairman, JCS, General David Jones: "JCS advice was not crisp, timely, useful, or very influential."

What this means to the new joint specialist is that the Schlesinger-Jones assessments of the quality of military advice must be fully turned around—stood on their head so to speak. In short, military advice must be crisp, timely, useful, relevant, persuasive, intellectually rigorous, and logically compelling. That is a tall order. The joint establishment works in a highly competitive environment not all friendly. The other departments of government and other philosophies compete for influence and the same shrinking resources. It is not enough to be convinced of the virtues and rightness of one's positions. It is also necessary to win in the fierce competition within the government. We might add that there is no law which requires a president or his administration to accept military advice. History tells us that often they do not.

This is the environment into which joint specialists are moving. To the extent that they are professionally sound, completely candid and clear, and devoted to the best interests of their country in the broadest sense, they will have done their duty as the law and the people require.

Hill Two: Operational Art

If military strategy is the compendium of existing plans, then the quality of the strategy is the sum of the quality of those plans. At the joint level these are operational plans connected at the top with policy and at the bottom with the tactical employment of forces.

Recently there has been great emphasis on operational art throughout the structure of professional military education. Much of that study has been devoted to past masters, theorists, and campaigns. That is good, but since the advent of nuclear weapons and the appearance of limited wars, the criteria for victory have tended to change. It is wise, therefore, to study our own experiences in the second half of this century from the operational perspective. The track record is spotty but illuminating. It seems to tell us that success is defined as the attainment of *political* objectives in a reasonable time, at bearable cost, and with public support until the end. These criteria have become the bottom line in our time. Any other outcome equates to failure. Failure is cruel. It ignores the elegance of tactical performance, the good intentions, and the devotion and sacrifice of individual members of the armed forces and their families throughout the country. Failure is corrosive. Success, then, is the business of today's joint specialist.

Let us review some of our recent military experiences from this perspective and while so doing pay special attention to the baleful consequences when policy and operations diverge or are otherwise disconnected.

Korea. When President Truman sent our enfeebled armed forces into Korea in 1950, at least the mission seemed clear—stop the North Koreans and protect the fledgling government in the South. But the outcome could have gone either way—as Wellington said after Waterloo, “It was a close run thing.”

General MacArthur's brilliant operational stroke at Inchon cut the North Korean line of communications and collapsed the invasion by the already exhausted and overextended North Korean army encircling Pusan. Then General MacArthur sent his forces north in pursuit of a broken enemy. The debate continues as to whether he and his Washington superiors were in any kind of agreement on policy goals and objectives in respect to the North Korean government, people, and territory. It seems probable that MacArthur had run out ahead of Washington thinking—a disconnect which can probably be laid at the feet of the government, not the commander in the field, who naturally wished to finish the matter off once and for all.

In any event the Chinese came in, revealing the utter inadequacy of the policy and the forces available at the time. When MacArthur's army was back in the South, very precise policy instructions were issued to confine operations to the border area with a mission of preserving the political and territorial integrity of the South. The United Nations forces recovered and faithfully executed the new policy, driving the Chinese and North Koreans back to, and slightly beyond, the original demarcation.

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But with the reins held so tightly, there was no leverage to end the war, which went on inconclusively at high cost, eventually losing the support of the people. There was no workable concept for ending the war militarily. Attrition warfare against China was unappealing. President Eisenhower broke the stalemate with a nuclear threat rendered via India, and we achieved an armistice which extends to this day. The nuclear option is probably no longer available, and we should be mindful that wars are easier to start than to stop.

Vietnam. An entirely different kind of war at the beginning, the Vietnam War came to resemble the Korean War at the end. Starting as a counterinsurgency in the South plus retaliatory air strikes in the North after the Tonkin Gulf affair in 1964, the war ended with massive bombing in the North and a full-fledged invasion of the South by a North Vietnamese army which threw five army corps, comprising 17 divisions, at Saigon in 1975.

US policy lagged behind the transitional realities throughout the war. Even after the North Vietnamese army began to arrive in the South in 1965, the policy remained one of counterinsurgency and attrition, while the bombing of the North—prior to the heavy bombing of 1972, which was simply too late—was used to send admonitory messages to Hanoi rather than to destroy its warmaking capabilities.

The command in Saigon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff both failed to persuade the Administration that the North Vietnamese line of communication (the Ho Chi Minh Trail) needed to be cut and that the port of Haiphong needed to be mined. The Administration considered these measures inconsistent with the nature of the war, which it persisted in viewing as an insurgency. Washington was also afraid of a Korean-like Chinese intervention—indeed, Chinese air defense and supply troops were already in North Vietnam.⁶

So the war went on inconclusively and expensively, and the American people gradually withdrew their support. The American government was forced to withdraw its forces from Vietnam in an agonizing failure of both policy and operations.

Beirut. The mission of the Marines in Beirut in 1983 at the time of the bombing of their barracks was “peacekeeping.” It was never quite clear what that meant. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Office of the Secretary of

Defense opposed the deployment. There was never an operational plan. The Marines at the airport were just waiting. This tragic episode counsels us to beware of vague missions for which no discernible military operational plan seems relevant. Some say the Marines were a “presence.” The Shiite factions were not impressed. Vague, exploratory deployments like “showing the flag” or “presence” are doubly dangerous because they permit incremental, flabby thinking in Washington. That is, little time or analysis is spent on the possible consequences of a contemplated action or the next steps to be taken should the first move prove to be ineffective or even disastrous.

Grenada. This was a success by all of our criteria—it was fast and relatively inexpensive, and the public had no time in which to become disaffected. On the other hand, execution was ragged. We seem to have a problem in organizing, training, and equipping joint headquarters before they are needed. They are therefore not always fully prepared for the complexities of modern joint operations. It is a problem worthy of the joint specialist’s most urgent attention.

Persian Gulf. The tanker escort mission was well done—no disconnects between policy and operations (with the exception of the Iranian airbus shoot-down, which was a tragic mistake)—and the means were adequate to the ends. However, let us suppose, hypothetically, that we had gone into Iran in pursuit of Silkworm missiles or earlier in accordance with the Carter doctrine. Would we have set ourselves up for the same dilemma that plagued us in Korea and Vietnam? If we had prosecuted a vigorous war against Iran, would it have brought in the Soviet Union directly or indirectly? And if we had held operations below the threshold of Soviet provocation, how would we ever have ended the war? The study of neither Clausewitz nor Napoleon reveals easy answers to this dimension of operational art in an era of limited wars and nuclear deterrence. It seems to be the classic operational trap of the last half of the 20th century. True, things went well with the Air Force and Navy’s punitive airstrikes against Tripoli in 1986, when the means seemed to fit the ends. But the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Noriega in Panama present us with different but no less vexing dilemmas as we approach the 1990s.

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Hill Three: Joint Force Requirements

Disturbed by the service-centered promotion of the 600-ship Navy, the Army's light divisions, and the Air Force plan to substitute F-16s for the aging A-10s as the preferred close air support platform, Congress wants force requirements to be derived in the future from the war plans of the combatant commanders—the CINCs.

However, it is not that simple. There are four essential participants in this centrally important function. The resource availabilities are set forth by the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the Joint Chiefs of Staff provide strategic plans and direction; the CINCs draw up the war plans; and the services develop the forces.

None of these functions is transferable. No one but the Navy can organize, train, and equip carrier battle groups; the Army—corps and divisions; the Air Force—wings and squadrons; and the Marines—amphibious forces. The force development process is therefore circular, iterative, interactive, and complex. It represents a vast sharing of responsibility across several huge bureaucratic institutions. It does no good to simplify it on paper. It won't simplify.

The pendulum of influence should swing toward the joint establishment, but not too far. Congress doesn't seem fully aware of the seminal contribution of the services in combining technology and tactics within fighting organizations and in training individuals and units up to high performance in the employment of those forces.

To some extent the shift from service dominance to joint participation is a cultural process. It may also be generational. That points to the emergence of the joint specialist.

Hill Four: Joint Control of Collateral Operations

In 1944 the Allies conducted a collateral deception operation which kept the German 15th Army pinned in the area of Calais waiting for the "real" invasion. Even after seven weeks of combat in Normandy, the Germans kept one eye on the Pas de Calais. Had it been otherwise the invasion might not have prospered. The deception operation was run directly out of the headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander. In 1985 the Israelis wished to invade Lebanon to force out the PLO. But the Syrian air defenses would have made it difficult to provide adequate air support to the Israeli army. After performing a protracted joint intelligence operation, which mapped the Syrian air defenses down to precise locations and communications links, nodes, and frequencies, the Israelis conducted a preliminary set of collateral operations. Drones activated the defenses; aircraft, artillery, and electronic warfare measures attacked the system simultaneously; fighters shot down the reacting Syrian air force; and commandos knocked out the central control headquarters. Then, and only then, did the

Israeli army begin to roll. This preliminary set of collateral operations was controlled by the chief of staff of the Israeli air force.

It seems certain that US joint commanders will wish to conduct similar collateral operations at their level in support of their joint concepts of operations. Over time, they might include any or all of the following candidates: joint intelligence; joint deception; joint command, control, and communications countermeasures; joint suppression of enemy air defenses; joint special operations; joint counterfire; joint regional air defense; joint special logistics; joint deep attack (FOFA); and others.

Each requires a commander, a concept of operations, a task organization, specified command relationships, and a qualified and seasoned joint staff. At the present time only special operations have such staffs and headquarters. For the others there are none, and in most cases such command arrangements have not even been conceptualized. This is exactly the kind of problem the joint specialist will wish to take on.

Hill Five: Synchronizing Cross-Service Support to the Tactical Level

The several armed services are specialized around the mediums in which they operate—land, sea, air, space, etc. But some of their specialties are also required by the other services. The organizational dilemma has always been whether to duplicate functions or share them. Sharing is the heart of jointness.

The Army has always been the leading proponent of jointness—not because it is more earnest or altruistic, but because it is massively dependent upon the other services. The Army can neither deploy nor fight exclusively with its own resources. In fact, there is cross-service involvement in every single Army combat and support function.

The Army deploys by air or sea. Army intelligence operations depend upon cross-service surveillance, reconnaissance, electronic intelligence, target acquisition, and help in intelligence fusion. Fire support always includes close air support and battlefield air interdiction—and sometimes naval gunfire support. Tactical maneuver may involve airborne or amphibious operations which depend upon Air Force or Navy support. Army and Air Force electronic warfare efforts are joint. Joint air defense is commanded by an Air Force officer. The Army depends constantly on air and sea lines of communication, including air delivery to forward units of critical munitions and repair parts. The Army in the field is a joint force.

The Joint Surveillance and Target Acquisition Radar System (JSTARS) is simply an extreme example. JSTARS, which is operated by the Air Force, is to the Army what the AWACS is to the Air Force itself. By locating and tracking the movement of enemy ground forces, JSTARS provides the real-time information required by corps, division, and brigade

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commanders to maneuver their forces and target the enemy. It is therefore at the heart of Army tactical operations. It is not just nice to have—it is indispensable.⁷

On the basis of JSTARS information, the Army corps, division, and brigade commanders rapidly develop their concepts of operations, which key all the battlefield functions to the support of maneuver. This is the way a commander concentrates combat power against the enemy in decisive bursts of intensity to win battles. Obviously, this process of synchronization must embrace the now integrated and essential cross-service support. Seizing the initiative in battle requires not only precision, but also very rapid synchronization. For this purpose command relationships must be tight, effective, and thoroughly understood. There is a certain looseness in the system today which can and should be tightened up. The term *support* is the key. It is not sensible to even think about attaching elements of the fleet to an Army corps for naval gunfire support nor extending the command authority of an Army division commander over the air bases from which his close air support is launched. But at the same time it is no longer tolerable to even think about withdrawing the Air Force JSTARS from support of an Army corps in action.

The modalities of support developed over the last century which regulate the command relationship between artillery and maneuver within the Army may have broader application to these increasingly intimate and time-sensitive cross-service relationships. For example JSTARS sorties could be placed in direct support of a corps—meaning they would not be withdrawn except in the most extreme and unusual emergencies. The divisions and brigades would receive a continuous stream of information on the location and movement of enemy forces. And yet JSTARS would remain unequivocally under Air Force command and control.

Close air support and battlefield air interdiction could be placed in general support, reinforcing the fire support of a particular corps but not necessarily in support of each division at all times. It would continue to operate within the Air Force tactical air command and control system. Deep

air interdiction could be placed in general support of the Army group or joint task force.

These modest adjustments to command relationships across service lines in the tactical arena might be beneficial and clarifying. They give a richer meaning to the term *support*. Just leaving everything up to the day-by-day or even minute-by-minute determination of a remote joint commander—the current practice—is not conducive to fast, effective synchronization of joint combat power and is not consistent with the degree of cross-service dependency which has arisen over the years.

Concluding Thought

How far the impetus of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation will carry the joint specialist up these five hills and many others only time will tell. We may find there are natural limits to the scope and utility of tactical jointness. But we most certainly have not even closely approached them thus far. Over the years ahead, the Joint Specialty Officer will need to introduce many changes in the joint establishment and in how it operates. He will bring a fresh generational viewpoint to the task, and that is exactly what is now needed.

NOTES

1. On 14 May 1975, 250 US Marines were landed on Koh Tang Island off the coast of Cambodia to rescue the 39 crew members of the SS *Mayaguez*, which had been seized along with its crew by a Cambodian gunboat. It turned out that the crew was not on the island chosen for assault, and the Marines, who encountered heavy Cambodian resistance, themselves had to be evacuated under fire. The operation resulted in 38 US dead, 50 wounded, and three missing. Although the *Mayaguez* itself was recaptured, the Cambodian government had already announced the release of the ship and crew when the attack began. See John E. Jessup, *A Chronology of Conflict and Resolution, 1945-1985* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 534.

2. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Staff Report, "Defense Reorganization: The Need for Change" (Washington: GPO, October 1985).

3. Public Law 99-433.

4. For an excellent discussion of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, see Don M. Snider, "DOD Reorganization: Part I, New Imperatives," *Parameters*, 17 (September 1987), 88-100; and "DOD Reorganization: Part II, New Opportunities," *Parameters*, 17 (December 1987), 49-58. The joint specialty for officers is discussed in Part I, pp. 94-96.

5. Pursuant to the Goldwater-Nichols legislation, the Secretary of Defense was to determine the number of joint duty positions within the defense establishment. The presently determined figure is 8300 (Rick Maze, "Services Blasted Again for Handling of Joint-Duty Posts," *Army Times*, 29 May 1989, p. 4). The Secretary is required to designate 1000 of these slots as "critical," meaning they *must* be filled with a JSO. The law further states that approximately half of the joint duty positions must at any one time be filled with an officer who is or has been nominated as a JSO, with this half including the 1000 "critical" JSO-required slots. To educate JSOs, the Skelton Panel has recommended a two-phase process. Phase I would be taught at the intermediate or senior service colleges; Phase II would be presented in a TDY status at the Armed Forces Staff College, *following* graduation from the intermediate or senior service colleges, to JSO-nominees en route to a joint-duty assignment (see US Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Report of the Panel on Military Education, 101st Cong., 1st sess., Committee Print 4 [Washington: GPO, 1989], pp. 3-4 and chap. III).

6. See "China Admits Combat in Vietnam War," *The Washington Post*, 17 May 1989, p. A31.

7. For the details of JSTARS, see Robert S. Dudley, "The Battle Vision of Joint STARS," *Air Force*, June 1989, pp. 42-45.