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The Joint Challenge—and Opportunity

JOHN C. FAITH

Following the euphoria and mutual congratulations attending the successful execution of the allied war plan to defeat Saddam Hussein, General Merrill McPeak, the US Air Force Chief of Staff, fired the first high-level salvo in the probably inevitable interservice scramble for credit for the victory and defense budget share. In a briefing on 15 March he declared that the war against Iraq marked “the first time in history that a field army has been defeated by air power.”¹

It must be acknowledged in any analysis of the coalition’s stunningly easy victory that the 100 days of aerial pounding had a profoundly damaging effect on the capability and will of the highly touted Iraqi forces to continue the war. It should also be acknowledged, however, that the Iraqi high command cooperated in the defeat of its forces to a degree probably not seen since the Roman Consuls Paulus and Varro assisted Hannibal’s coalition of Africans, Gauls, and Spaniards in the decisive defeat of Rome’s forces at Cannae in 216 B.C. It is crucial to the future security of the nation that we not draw the wrong or precipitous conclusions from our overwhelming victory over Iraq.

The purpose of this essay is to highlight selected recent events and trends indicating a watershed in the international environment, to suggest an approach the Department of Defense and the services should adopt at this critical juncture to prepare most effectively for the future, and to identify several key areas needing DOD and service analysis.

To be worthy of the high esteem in which they are currently held by the American public, our civilian and military leaders must follow up the thoroughly professional combined operations conducted in the Gulf with an equally professional approach to the future. They must be supported in this effort by the Congress, in whose hands rests the power to aid or subvert much of what must be done, and who, if DOD fails to act effectively, will by default shape the future through their control of appropriations.

The Changed International Environment

It is clear that both domestic and world events are conspiring to force some critical and far-reaching decisions regarding the size, shape, and capabilities of our armed forces. Reduction in size and cost is inevitable. Effectiveness for the future is the issue. In addition to recent combat lessons, the dominant factors that Pentagon and unified/specified command planners must consider involve the drastically changing relationships, capabilities, and internal dynamics of our potential adversaries. Foremost of these, of course, are the countries of the recently dissolved Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet Union, currently in turmoil over the future of the federation and its own economy.

Of only slightly less concern, however, are the pressures in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere (including Iraq) based on historic ethnic, nationalistic, and religious conflicts; the future relationship of North and South Korea; and recent untoward events in Central and South America, Africa, and China. In fact, US plans must be developed in an environment characterized by nationalistic turmoil, the desperate plight of deprived peoples, the loosening shackles generated by democratic fervor, and repressive regimes of all political stripes.

Experience in Panama in Operation Just Cause highlighted several conclusions that were confirmed later in Operation Desert Storm. Among the most obvious are the requirement for clear, unambiguous unified command and control arrangements; the importance of pre-operation as well as operational intelligence, and the difficulties of assessment and dissemination; the great effectiveness of many high-technology weapons and systems; and the absolute criticality of rapid, coordinated application of overwhelming force to forestall long, costly campaigns. I would suggest also, however, that our experience in Just Cause and its aftermath should be viewed primarily as an exercise of our rear battle doctrine, capabilities, and planning, with the threat varying between Level II and Level III.² This observation is not meant to reflect in any way adversely on the effectiveness of our engaged forces, but to point out that many of the most important considerations—such as operational boundaries, control of indirect fire, rules of engagement when operating in the midst of a friendly or neutral civil population, size and composition of required forces, and the difficulty of supplanting and then restoring civil

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rule—were more appropriate to rear than to main or deep battle doctrine. I would further suggest that, if viewed in this light, Operation Just Cause can yield lessons of direct value as we develop forces for the future.

Analysis of Desert Storm, already a cottage industry and political football, can be used to “prove” a number of strongly held if contentious viewpoints. We can sidestep these and concentrate instead on a few broad issue-areas that bear directly on how we shape our future defense and around which some consensus seems to have developed, though more analysis will be needed.

Among these broad areas of concern, we should note the critical role of the United Nations in ensuring the legitimacy and, one hopes, the long-range value of the decisive reaction to Iraq’s aggression. This role has important implications. For example, military operations in support of UN resolutions will most often, if not always, be coalition efforts, and this may well be the pattern in the future. Undoubtedly, the experience of generations of US officers in planning for coalition warfare in NATO and Korea, as well as their association with allied officers in staff and war college courses, enhanced CENTCOM’s expertise at quickly molding the diverse military contingents of an improbable group of nations into an effective fighting force and will continue to be a positive factor in the future.

Another area of concern is that of strategic lift. There was an obvious shortfall of immediately responsive US air and sea lift to move the forces and supporting logistics to the theater as rapidly as desired. Had Iraqi forces moved into northeast Saudi Arabia and seized the Saudi Gulf ports after occupying Kuwait, the allied problems would have been immensely more difficult. But even possessing the ports, we would certainly have faced serious difficulties in any situation where we were not afforded the luxury of a five-month buildup.

Finally, we will need to study further the nation’s dependence on a reserve call-up to deploy, employ, and sustain a force of any size. As part of the analysis of this area, there is a need to assess the importance of that call-up in shaping the nation’s will and support for the legitimacy of the US initiative. There is an equally critical need to review the existing active-reserve structure, which was designed to fight a NATO-Warsaw Pact war.

In the face of these daunting challenges and the projected reductions in resources, DOD has a choice of three roads to follow in restructuring the nation’s forces, and the decision must be made very soon. One choice would

be to undertake a fundamental reorganization of the forces based on current realities and trends, at whatever cost to traditional service “truths” and narrow constituency concerns. Another choice would be simply to “salami-slice” the forces to meet mandated end-strength and dollar goals. This approach would entail a proportional reduction of all programs and accounts rather than getting rid of the marginal ones while more fully funding those of greater importance. Or, DOD could let Congress do it, for, as some of its members have previously threatened, they will step in if DOD drags its feet. Clearly, the first road is the most difficult—many would say impossible—but clearly also it is by far the most desirable. And it is the only road capable of producing the US military organization required for the late 1990s and early 21st century.

How to plan in such an environment? Mission impossible? Not necessarily, but we need to keep a couple of cautions in mind. As retired Air Force General Michael Dugan has wisely warned: “While Desert Storm was a triumph, it is now the last war. The circumstances will never be repeated, and the young majors who will lead our forces a generation from now need to keep their eyes on the future, not the past.”³ Put another way, the Gulf War, which some perceive as a harbinger of the future, may very well be the last Fulda Gap-type confrontation. We also must guard against service parochialism. It is perhaps inevitable—in fact, it would be very surprising were it not—that even the purple-suit planners who address the future of our armed forces will enter the discussions with service loyalties intact and their own particular “lessons learned” firmly fixed in their minds. They will see their duty—and assume it to be a matter of moral courage—to fight for what they perceive as the “facts,” however questionable those facts may appear to members of other services.

A New Departure for Decisionmaking

The foregoing survey of the complicated and vastly changed world environment brings me to my next main concern: how should the JCS, service, and unified and specified command planners address the critical organizational changes necessary to retain US leadership under the new circumstances? In approaching the subject of reorganization, especially if the extent of reorganization will mean significant trade-offs among the services, one quickly enters a dangerous minefield. The first question, of course, is why is anything more than minor adjustments necessary in view of our overwhelming success in Operation Desert Storm? Didn't we prove the validity of our doctrine, the efficacy of our training, and the effectiveness of our weapons and organizations? Perhaps so for the post-World War II era, but as I have been at pains to suggest, we have reached the end of that era. The United States is the sole remaining superpower, with worldwide interests and the prospect of continued worldwide obligations. But there are limits to what we can aspire to do, since these foreign obligations will clash head-on with domestic

interests. The American people will demand, and have every right to expect, the adjustment of priorities and resources to address our pressing human, infrastructure, and environmental problems. The military must be prepared to face unclear worldwide threats with significantly reduced forces.

If it is true that our problem is not simply one of fine-tuning, that it cannot be solved by modest across-the-board cuts, then how should our planners and decisionmakers proceed? At this point, I want to take a page from the preeminent management theorist, Peter F. Drucker, whose five elements of decisionmaking have come to be broadly recognized for their relevance across a variety of disciplines. Certainly they have obvious application to military decisionmaking.⁴ Drucker's five elements are outlined below, along with a brief indication of how each applies to the restructuring problems facing our military establishment.

- First, are we facing a *truly new and permanently changed situation*, or merely a temporary aberration? More specifically, is a fundamental adjustment required or only adaptations of current doctrine, organization, and supporting structure? My thesis is that we are truly at a crossroad—that we face a permanently revised situation requiring fundamental decisions at the highest government levels.

- Second, we need to know clearly *what it is the decision has to accomplish*. What are the objectives that have to be satisfied? Basically, we need a clear-eyed joint assessment of our defense requirements in this changed—and changing—world: the basis for a structure of forces capable of rapid, flexible, decisive action in situations ranging from nation-building assistance for developing countries to high-intensity combat—all at acceptable cost.

- Third, we need to *develop the ideal solution*. We have to know first the ideal solution rather than merely what is acceptable, because we must lay a basis for the inevitable compromises to come. In Drucker's words, "If one does not know what is right to satisfy the specifications and boundary conditions, one cannot distinguish between the right compromise and the wrong compromise." This is a critical point. It is critical always to recall the ideal solution as we inch toward a compromise solution affected by the internal (interservice) and external (congressional) politics that will inevitably be brought to bear.

- Fourth, *the decision must be implemented*. This seemingly self-evident tenet needs stressing, however, because during the typically long time lapses between decision and ultimate implementation, the original purposes of the decision become lost or obscured. The process is lengthy and enervating, requiring refighting with each annual budget, even after the decision is reflected in the DOD five-year defense plan. The temptation will be strong to back off from some elements of the decision for economic, political, or personality (leadership turnover) reasons. True, there may be sound reasons for modifications based on changing world conditions. But the basic thrust

and, indeed, the details of the decision must be pursued with single-minded purpose, because any radical reorganization emasculated in execution would likely leave the forces unbalanced and vulnerable.

- Last is *the requirement for evaluation*. The solution must be constantly tested against actual events. The military solution will be assessed in exercises as well as through accomplishment of real-world missions.

Ascertaining the Ideal Solution

Going back to the third of Drucker's five elements of the decision process, how can we tell what indeed *is* the ideal solution? That is, how can we ascertain the most effective overall structure of our forces for the challenges of the '90s and beyond? Drucker quickly dismisses two key myths embedded in most conventional approaches to decisionmaking: get the facts and create consensus. As he points out, "People do not start out with the search for facts. They start out with an opinion." But this is okay, even expected. "Not to have an opinion after having been exposed to an area for a good long time would argue an unobservant eye and a sluggish mind." Further, it is not desirable initially to try to get the facts. People "will simply do what everyone is far too prone to do anyhow: Look for the facts that fit the conclusion they have already reached. And no one has ever failed to find the facts he is looking for." So far as creating consensus is concerned, Drucker is emphatic in insisting that the important decisions, those requiring participation by senior decisionmakers, are not made without creating dissension and disagreement in the process: "The first rule in decisionmaking is that one does not make a decision unless there is disagreement." Indeed, a decision would not have been necessary if the right course was self-evident.

What do these two insights mean in the context of seeking the ideal force alignment? Obviously, the DOD decisionmakers will begin with lots of "facts"—too many. There are Army facts, Air Force facts, Navy facts, Marine facts, EUCOM facts, CENTCOM facts, etc., etc. Further, the decisionmakers will also begin with dissension and disagreements aplenty—generally aligned with the various perceptions of the "facts." The critical missing element is what Drucker calls the "criterion of relevance." How do we measure what facts, arguments, and elements of any proposed solution are relevant? We should begin by assuming that the current measurement criteria may be wrong. What are the alternatives? Determining the appropriate criteria is critical—and that determination is, as Drucker says, "a risk-taking judgment." In the military context the relevant criteria and measurements must evolve directly from the mission and tasking of DOD by the National Command Authorities, from assessment of the threat, and from recognition of the resource limits.

Drucker emphasizes the need for alternatives, for disagreement, both initially in determining the relevant criteria and measurements, and later as the

decisionmaking process unfolds. A critical problem here is that historically disagreements within the US military establishment have been interservice, or between the services and the JCS, or between the operational commands and the JCS. The fostering of dissenting views and alternative solutions *within* a service, the JCS, or a unified or specified command headquarters has not been a strength of the institution. Indeed, too often emphasis on loyalty and teamwork has been used to stifle initiative and dissenting views. The achievement of the best solution, however, demands that alternatives and conflicting views from within be aired and considered.

According to Drucker, the encouragement of new ideas and dissenting views is essential for several reasons. First, it "is the only safeguard against the decisionmaker's becoming the prisoner of the organization." The only way to hope to avoid the siren call of tradition as well as the widespread criticism that the military is always preparing for the last war is to ensure that "argued, documented, thought-through disagreements" are encouraged and confronted. Furthermore, only through disagreement can alternatives be raised for consideration in the decisionmaking process. Any decision made without consideration of alternatives has to be suspect. It should also be noted that disagreement stimulates the imagination. As Drucker puts it, "In all matters of true uncertainty . . . one needs 'creative' solutions. . . . And this means that one needs imagination—a new and different way of perceiving and understanding." This kind of imagination exists in the services in every headquarters, but its exercise is not widely encouraged. It needs to be.

There is probably very little that can be done in the near term (1992-94) to begin to implement a totally joint approach to our defense requirements. Damage-limiting, temporizing measures will be necessary. At the same time, however, the search for the ideal long-range solution must be initiated now. To bring this somewhat theoretical discussion into a more practical focus, we may sum up the proper methodology for that search. First, the currently proposed national strategy and the accompanying defense guidance must be fully analyzed, debated, and, once settled upon, disseminated in clear, unambiguous language. This step involves risk-taking decisions. They should encompass a broad-based set of national objectives which are do-able in conjunction with necessary domestic programs. At the same time, the revised world context must be reassessed, analyzed, debated, and conditionally accepted by planners, recognizing that it is subject to unexpected and sometimes rapid changes. Based on these assessments—in effect, mission and threat—true no-holds-barred analysis and debate are necessary throughout the defense establishment. No sacred cows. No protected turf. The goal is to lay out the "right" solution as a target, prior to the inevitable compromises. The mavericks and imaginative thinkers need free rein and encouragement during this debate to ensure that all potential pieces of the best solution are aired.

Sticky Wickets

Based on this brief summary of the world environment and the outline of an approach to making the critical decisions, here is my assessment of some of the main early hurdles that need to be opened up for true joint analysis. Several directly affect service roles and missions. These will obviously be contentious, but they must be addressed honestly.

- *Active Component Force Structure.* The balance and composition of the immediately available combat and support forces in each of the services have to be determined. For the Army, the balance among heavy, light, and special operations forces is the starting point, since they drive the size and makeup of the support forces. The Army solution, however, must be determined in conjunction with the Marine ground forces and the special operations forces of the other services. Here, as in most of the areas below, the question is who can do what most effectively, without unnecessary duplication? What trade-offs are necessary or desirable?

- *Balance of Active Versus Reserve Components.* The experience of Just Cause and Desert Storm will be instructive. The National Guard and Army Reserve leadership must be fully involved in the decision process. They have useful ideas; and they believe, with cause, that they are too frequently left out until the decisions have been made. Their involvement is all the more essential if it is determined that such initiatives as the Army's Capstone and roundout programs, valuable and important for reserve component readiness, require modification.

- *Spectrum of Missions.* The broad range of potential requirements that could erupt in sometimes remote geographical areas throughout the world must be fully confronted. The list could include counter-terrorism, counter-drug, nation-building, evacuation of civilians, nuclear/chemical threats, disaster relief, and support of legitimate governments. The need for ready, area-oriented, language-trained teams with detailed knowledge of the geography, politics, and cultures in potential employment areas is obvious. The form they should take is not.

- *Force Projection.* Parallel development of air and sea lift capabilities with force packages, deployed forces, and pre-positioned equipment and supplies is essential. The success of the massive deployment of units and supplies for Desert Storm was more a tribute to intelligent ad hoc decisions, hard work, and scrounged resources than to planning and deployment readiness. Next time we may not have five months to get there and get ready.

- *Joint Service Support Organizations.* This point will raise hackles, but the need should be apparent to look at eliminating duplication in such areas as transportation, medical support, communications, supply procurement and distribution, intelligence, and legal support. There are also other

more costly areas, such as research and development, that could well yield savings through joint approaches.

• *Readiness and Training.* General Dugan points out that “the kind of training that enabled US forces to carry out the bold Desert Storm plan is in grave jeopardy as the defense budget shrinks.”⁵ Operations and maintenance funds, which pay for unit training and joint exercises, have no constituency in Congress. They look soft at budget-cutting time. Their preservation at appropriate levels must be an integral part of any decision.

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This is not the time for business-as-usual solutions, with each service fighting for its maximum piece of the pie. We are at a critical juncture. DOD and the JCS must seize the moment and build on the enormous prestige of the Desert Storm victory to co-opt the services (active and reserve), the operational command CINCs, and, yes, the Congress in pointing the basic direction for a ground-up reorganization of the forces and methods for accomplishing the missions assigned our defense establishment. Admittedly the decisions will be complicated, the risks great, and the protagonists entrenched. Nevertheless, the need for early decisive action is overwhelming.

A key element demanding reiteration and emphasis is the critical importance of imagination, innovation, and bold thinking to the decision process and, ultimately, to the future strength of our armed forces. Many critics, in uniform and out, have pointed out that the services (indeed, most large institutions) have not been kind or receptive to their mavericks. There are, in fact, indications that in the business world many of these valuable individuals are losing out to the “team players” as industry cuts back in the current recession. As the military services themselves face significant reductions-in-force in the next few years, it is more than likely that a disproportionate percentage of our losses will be the critical, restless, imaginative officers we need to serve as a repository of new ideas to meet future crises. We can keep many of them by encouraging and rewarding their active participation in the decision process. We cannot afford the alternative.

NOTES

1. As quoted in Barton Gellman, “U.S. Bombs Missed 70% of Time,” *The Washington Post*, 16 March 1991, p. A1.

2. Enemy attacks on rear area installations are categorized as: Level I—Agents, saboteurs, terrorists; Level II—Diversionary operations and sabotage by tactical units smaller than a battalion; or Level III—Attacks by battalion-size or larger units. FM 100-16, *Support Operations: Echelons Above Corps* (Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army, April 1985), p. 5-7.

3. Michael J. Dugan “First Lessons of Victory,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 18 March 1991, pp. 32-36.

4. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 1967), chaps. 6, 7. All quotations in this and the succeeding section are from Drucker.

5. Dugan.