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Framing a Strategic  
Approach for

# **Joint Officer Management**

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# Summary

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## Background and Purpose

The Goldwater-Nichols Act (GNA) of 1986 forged a cultural revolution in the U.S. armed forces by improving the way the Department of Defense (DoD) prepares for and executes its mission.<sup>1</sup> Title IV of the GNA addresses joint officer personnel policies and provides specific personnel management requirements for the identification, education, training, promotion, and assignment of officers to joint duties.

Recent studies<sup>2</sup> suggest the need for DoD to revisit joint manpower matters and develop a strategic approach to joint officer management and joint professional military education (JPME).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002 directed an independent study of joint officer management, JPME, and the roles of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. While the independent study was in progress, the General Accounting Office (GAO)<sup>4</sup> conducted an assessment of DoD actions to implement provisions in law that address the devel-

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<sup>1</sup> Goldwater-Nichols is discussed in more detail in Appendix A, which provides a primer for many of the terms and concepts discussed herein.

<sup>2</sup> General Accounting Office, *Joint Officer Development Has Improved, but a Strategic Approach Is Needed*, GAO-03-238, 2002; Booz Allen Hamilton, *Independent Study of Joint Officer Management and Joint Professional Military Education*, McLean, Va., 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Professional Military Education is discussed in more detail in Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Renamed the Government Accountability Office in July 2004.

opment of officers in joint matters. It also evaluated DoD's ability to fully respond to the provisions of the GNA.

The GAO stated that "a significant impediment affecting DoD's ability to fully realize the cultural change that was envisioned by the act is the fact that DoD has not taken a strategic approach to develop officers in joint matters."<sup>5</sup>

A strategic approach to human resource management determines the need for critical workforce characteristic(s) given missions, goals, and desired organizational outcomes; assesses availability of the characteristic(s) now and in the future; and suggests changes in management practices for personnel with the characteristic(s) to minimize gaps between need and availability. This report applies a strategic approach to the development of officers in joint matters.

## Research Approach

This strategic approach was developed consistent with the human resources literature regarding the purposes, intents, and qualities of strategic approaches. To assess the amount of joint experience or joint education currently available among the officer corps, we conducted detailed statistical analysis of longitudinal data files constructed from the officer master file. The quantitative analysis that we prescribe will support a determination of the need for and the provision of desired work characteristics (e.g., to what extent different positions either require or provide joint experience). In addition, while developing this strategic approach, we conducted interviews and group discussions with many officers to gain insights regarding the characteristics that positions would be likely to require (or provide), problems and shortcomings of the existing system, likely resistance to or difficulties in developing a new management system, and other helpful suggestions regarding a new management system for joint officers. Officers from each of the services' officer management offices participated in

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<sup>5</sup> General Accounting Office, *Joint Officer Development Has Improved, but a Strategic Approach Is Needed*, GAO-03-238, 2002

these discussions, as did officers from each of the senior service schools. We also traveled to several combatant commands (EUCOM, PACOM, SOCOM), where we interviewed officers in leadership positions and conducted group discussions with officers in pay grades O-4 through O-6 from their J-1, J-2, J-3, J-4, J-5, and J-6 offices. We also conducted similar group discussions with officers from each of the collocated service component commands.

## **Management of the Joint Duty Assignment List, and Joint Officer Development**

The President's National Security Strategy as well as service and joint vision documents describes increasingly joint missions, but officer management is following the trend more slowly. Data indicate a decreasing fill rate of joint duty assignments (JDAs) for three of the four services. (The Marine Corps is not only increasing the rate at which it fills joint assignments, but also increasing its share of the Joint Duty Assignment List [JDAL].) The service personnel managers (for all but the Marine Corps) note the difficulty in fitting joint assignments into officers' career paths and are reflective of individual service cultures that are generally less respectful of joint experience than of that gained within their services. Nonetheless, longitudinal data indicate an increasing amount of jointness among the officer corps.

Four general observations emerge from our look at these data.

- In general, the data give evidence that jointness is accreting in the officer corps. Officers as a group are more "joint" with each passing year. Officers who are joint specialty officers (JSOs), who are joint qualified, or who have some joint experience advance in grade and stay in service at rates sufficient to have increased overall joint content of the officer corps over time. This is more accurately stated for certain grades, occupations, and services than for others.

- One can draw different inferences by looking at the data in different ways. For example, if one examines the entire officer corps for grades O-4 and above, the fact that it has accumulated about 15 percent of officers with at least some joint experience does not seem high.<sup>6</sup> However, the denominator in the equation consists of many officers in occupations not inherently joint (e.g., health) and is more heavily weighted toward O-4s who have had less time to be joint. As one focuses on certain occupations (e.g., intelligence, tactical operations) or on particular grades in which a higher cumulative opportunity to become joint has existed (e.g., O-6), one sees a far rosier picture of the accretion of jointness in the officer corps.
- Increases in jointness have consistently occurred each year. However, a cursory look at the data indicates that such increases are leveling off, i.e., becoming asymptotic at current levels. How joint the officer corps can be is dependent on the opportunity to have a JDA and to attend JPME Phase II. The seats for the latter are limited, and the number of the former is also limited. It may be that, given these constraints, underlying job and educational durations, and continuation and promotion rates, the ability to increase jointness further in the officer corps in the future may not exist absent changes in the number and duration of school and assignment seats. These limits can be explored with career models of the type we discuss later in this report.
- While there are observable differences in behaviors and outcomes between those with and without joint experience, these differences are more apparent in data describing officers leaving the service than in data showing officers' advancement in their services, and many of these differences either may not be signifi-

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<sup>6</sup> We parsed joint experience into three groups. The first are those who have received full credit for a joint tour but are not JSOs. The second are those who are JSOs. The third are those who at a point in time are not in the first two groups but have some joint experience in a qualifying position. For example, they may be currently serving in such a position or they may have received partial credit for past service. We also track officers who have no joint experience in a qualifying JDAL position. We will differentiate among these groups for some of the figures and analysis in Chapter Three.



cant or may result from other factors than jointness. For example, promoting more to O-4 in one year than in other years can change the joint content at that grade for one or more years.

## **A Strategic Approach to Joint Officer Management**

A strategic approach must understand the need or requirement for critical workforce characteristics and the ability of the management system to provide officers with those characteristics. Moreover, the approach needs to demonstrate (1) a strategy or policy for aligning the availability of officers with the characteristic with the need for them or (2) a rationale for why more widespread availability of the characteristic than the immediate need for it would be desirable. A strategic approach for joint officer management must deliberately determine which jobs, inside or outside the service, require joint experience or provide it. In particular, given the current strategic intent of DoD with respect to jointness (“push it to its lowest appropriate level”), the need for joint experience should be measurable in a much larger number of billets—in particular, in billets internal to the service. Moreover, valid joint experience might now be provided by service in billets internal to the service, particularly those associated with joint task forces, with service component commands, and with joint planning and operations. The key components of a strategic approach can be discerned as (1) which jobs require or provide joint experience, (2) how many of each exist, and (3) what is needed to align those two sets of jobs.

## **Implementing a Strategic Approach for Joint Officer Management**

Our recommended approach has five major steps:

1. Define workforce characteristics that will be needed in the future to meet strategic intent. We believe that these characteristics can

be aggregated into proxy variables for competencies based on experiences such as joint multiservice, joint interagency, and joint multinational<sup>7</sup> and on joint education and/or joint training. The accuracy of billet needs with respect to characteristics such as grade (experience), occupation, and other characteristics will need to be assumed.

2. Define needs for these characteristics of joint experience, education, and training. Where (in what positions) are officers with joint experience, education, and training needed? How many of these positions are there? Does this differ across services, for different occupations, or at different levels of seniority? Does the need for such officers extend to in-service billets? For this step, we recommend collecting data as to which external and in-service billets need an officer with prior joint experience or education.
3. Identify officers with these characteristics who are currently available. We recommend using existing personnel databases to assess the current numbers of officers with the experience and education characteristic of interest. We recommend surveying all external billets (and selected in-service billets) to determine those billets that provide joint experience to officers as a basis for projecting future availability. Current numbers and timing of JPME II seats<sup>8</sup> will likely need to be used as the start point for projecting educational qualifications.
4. Use models to
  - a. Project availability of officers with these characteristics in the future, given certain career management practices

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<sup>7</sup> We have begun to see use of the acronym “JIM” to reflect joint (multiservice), interagency, and multinational as separate components of the larger concept of jointness. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

<sup>8</sup> As of this writing, the House Armed Services Committee has a provision in its version of the 2006 NDAA that would increase the number of institutions that could provide JPME II and thus increase the number of JPME II graduate rates. Depending on the final outcome of this provision, we will incorporate any changes in the modeling approach we take in the next phase of our research.

- b. Calculate future gaps between the need for officers and the availability of them<sup>9</sup>
  - c. Refine and evaluate near-term policy alternatives to reduce gaps within the strategic context
  - d. Develop strategies that address long-term issues for reducing the gaps.
5. Identify other implications of the strategic approach such as effects on objectives and desired metrics for evaluation.

In summary, the strategic approach needs to confirm the characteristics of interest. We assert they are likely multiservice, multinational, and interagency experience as well as joint training and joint education. Data need to be gathered that will confirm the characteristics of interest as well as quantify the need for jointness, the current stock of jointness, and the possible future provision of jointness. This report contains protocols and instructions for collection both types of data. Modeling should confirm the degree to which jointness can be accumulated and the extent to which the future stock of jointness will satisfy the future identified demand for jointness.

## Identifying Policy Implications

Using the data on the need for and availability of the workforce characteristics and the management frameworks, the analysis to implement the strategic approach should provide input to such policy issues as the following:

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<sup>9</sup> We are using the logic that underlies strategic human capital management of matching availability of workforce characteristics to the demand for them. This assumes that there is a cost for developing people with these characteristics so that both an over and under supply of the characteristic is not desirable. However, other assumptions could be made that change the nature of the assessments we are making. For example, the availability of officers with joint experience and/or education could lead to increasing demand for them in many military positions. The availability of such officers could, by itself, create a need for them.

- Which variables should be included in a definition of qualifying joint experience?
- How “joint” should a billet be in order to be considered validly joint?
- Should joint experience gained from multiservice, multinational, and interagency billets be managed or tracked separately? Are the needs and sources of each distinctly separable?
- Should minimizing oversight and repetitive measurement be a consideration? For example, if an organization is 95 percent joint, should all billets at that organization receive joint credit? If all billets are somewhat joint, should all billets provide joint credit?
- What management frameworks are suggested for different services and occupations? How different is that from the status quo?
- Are there other occupational considerations? For example, will some career fields have more difficulty gaining jointness?
- What is the relationship between necessary education and training and existing resources? Are more resources (seats) needed?
- What should be the objectives and metrics of a system to develop officers in joint matters?

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Goldwater-Nichols deserves some reconsideration, given the increasing number of joint operations, the recognition of the value of jointness among officers, and the changing management practices for officers with joint experience. All the original objectives of the GNA may not still be appropriate, and considerable conflict exists within the GNA objectives as well as between the GNA objectives and the stated goals of the services, the joint organizations, and individual officers.

However, it is not clear that the types of constraints and requirements stated in the GNA should be eliminated. Military missions are increasingly integrated, and military officers are increasingly joint. However, there still exists some cultural resistance to officers’

jointness. In other words, the officer management systems in most of the services are still generally resistant to developing joint officers and would likely revert to management processes that did not support jointness in the absence of GNA-type requirements, constraints, and reporting mechanisms.

A strategic approach to joint officer management, as outlined here, aligns human capital with the organization's mission, rather than empowering other influences, such as organizational, administrative, and cultural heritage or the current social, cultural, and legal practices and beliefs. The strategic approach described herein for joint officer management considers and balances the assignments that require joint experience, education, training, or acculturation with the ways officers receive joint experience, education, training, or acculturation.

The next research step is to operationalize, or implement, the strategic plan for joint officer management. This implementation will require extensive data gathering and complex modeling and data analysis in order to formulate appropriate policy alternatives. This report provides the implementable means to do this.