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Enhancing the Performance of Senior Department of Defense Civilian Executives, Reserve Component General/Flag Officers, and Senior Noncommissioned Officers in Joint Matters

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Summary

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition that leaders across the Total Force must have greater understanding of the various roles, boundaries, and functions assigned the combatant commanders, other services, combat support agencies, and interagency organizations. General and flag officers, political appointees, and SES members provide the executive leadership that must develop and execute the Department of Defense's (DoD's) strategy for the defense of the nation. Reserve component G/FOs make up over 40 percent of the total G/FO population, and today one in five G/FO billets in joint organizations is filled by RC G/FOs. Senior noncommissioned officers provide the critical link between the enlisted corps and the officer corps, and vice versa. Most SNCOs exercise leadership at tactical and operational levels; however, a select few serve at the highest levels, advising service Secretaries, service Chiefs of Staff, combatant commanders, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on all matters pertaining to the well-being and utilization of the enlisted force.

This report examines the preparation of SES members, RC G/FOs, and SNCOs for participation in joint matters and recommends courses of action to better prepare them for joint positions. After reviewing the existing literature, we conducted interviews to explore the opinions of a select group of senior people who had served at the highest executive levels of DoD and were in positions to observe and evaluate the performance of both military and civilian personnel in terms of their knowledge of and performance in joint matters. We also interviewed a number of senior members who had been identified as being exemplars with respect to participating in joint activities. Using the information gleaned from the interviews and our review of existing research, we developed a number of tentative findings and recommendations. To refine our findings and recommendations, we developed briefings and standardized protocols for use during the focus groups and next round of interviews. Last, having developed our recommendations, we worked with the appropriate OSD staffs to link them to possible initiatives.

The results of the research are presented in Chapters Two, Three, and Four for SES, RC G/FOs, and SNCOs, respectively. Each chapter contains specific recommendations and links them to current—or possibly new—initiatives. The report concludes with four overarching observations and several suggested actions.

Observations

Interviewees used similar phrases but in different contexts. Although each group consisted of different interviewees, they all used similar terms and expressions to describe the critical attributes needed for success in joint matters. As the interviews continued, however, it became clear that those terms could not be detached from the contexts in which they were used—the contexts in which the leaders are expected to excel: the scope of responsibilities, the type of organization, and level of joint activity (strategic, operational, and tactical).

Joint development is a subset of senior leader development. Across the three groups, interviewees consistently stressed that a large portion of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that characterize effective leadership in the joint arena is comparable to nonjoint positions, whether within the services or in another component of the DoD. The most important attributes appear transferable from organization to organization and from nonjoint to joint positions. Nevertheless, the interviewees also suggested that senior leaders serving in joint positions needed *additional* competencies that relate to a joint perspective, optimizing joint capability, and the operational and strategic art of joint warfare.

More senior leaders need training in joint matters. The lack of purposeful development in joint matters has caused many of these senior leaders to lack appropriate “joint acumen.” Thus, more deliberate mid-career development is needed for prospective SES members, RC G/FOs, and SNCOs to ensure they are properly prepared for joint senior leadership positions. These development programs would include selecting high-potential, mid-career people and providing them appropriate experiences, training and education in joint matters. Also, jointness extends beyond traditional joint organizations. As other research has found for active-duty officers, our research indicates that many SES members, RC G/FOs, and SNCOs outside of joint organizations are engaged in joint matters.

Systemic obstacles exist. Although the specific details vary among the three groups studied, each faces systemic obstacles that impede their acquisition of the requisite joint experience, education, and training. The common obstacles are associated with funding, inadequate understanding of concepts for joint development, and the absence of management systems to track and facilitate joint experience.

Suggested Actions

Continue with the implementation of current initiatives. OSD, the Joint Staff, and the services have implemented initiatives designed to improve the performance of SES members, RC G/FOs, and SNCOs in joint matters. Thus, many of the recommendations proposed in this study are already being addressed by initiatives listed below.

The SES initiatives include

- Developing 21st-Century DoD Senior Executive Service Leaders
- Pilot Program for the Recruitment of SES positions in Combatant Commands
- Defense Leadership and Management Program (DLAMP) and DoD Executive Leadership Development Program (ELDP)
- Department of Defense National Security Personnel System (NSPS).

The RC G/FO initiatives include

- Strategic Plan for Joint Officer Management (JOM) and Joint Professional Military Education (JPME)
- Strategic Plan for Transforming DoD Training Reserve Component JPME Beyond Phase I
- Civilian Employment Information Program.

The SNCO initiatives include

- Senior Enlisted JPME Course
- Keystone Program for Senior Enlisted Leaders.

Explore the implementation of additional initiatives. To create a larger pool of joint qualified SES members, RC G/FOs, and SNCOs, we recommend developing additional initiatives in the following areas:

For SES members:

- more joint education and training
- cross-service and interagency assignments.

For RC G/FOs:

- additional options to increase RC JPME beyond Phase I
- improved RC joint career management.

For SNCOs:

- more and earlier (perhaps E-6 but no later than E-8) training in joint matters
- additional opportunities to receive instruction from service academies other than a senior NCO's own service
- exploring the feasibility of instituting a Joint Senior Enlisted Leader Academy
- a review by the services of their respective promotion systems to ensure that they do not inadvertently penalize NCOs who pursue joint experiences

- a centralized mechanism and standardized procedures to identify and facilitate joint rotational opportunities
- establishing broad guidelines to provide the services guidance in preparing SNCOs for joint E-9 leadership positions
- codifying procedures for nominating SNCOs for joint leadership.

Conduct appropriate cost/benefit analyses.