

Preparation of Senior Department of Defense Civilian Executives, Reserve Component General/Flag Officers, and Senior NCOs for Joint Roles

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The evolving nature of modern military operations and finite resources will increasingly require DoD’s civilian executives, general/flag officers (including those in the reserve components), and senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to perform effectively in multiservice, multinational, and interagency environments. They will need to work in a more collaborative manner and have a greater understanding of the various roles, boundaries, and functions assigned the combatant commands, other services, combat support agencies, interagency organizations, and the members of international coalitions. To do so, they will need to be trained, educated, and experienced in joint matters.

A new RAND study examines the preparation of these senior leaders for participation in joint military activities. It also offers overarching observations that apply to the three categories and identifies actions that the services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) can pursue to better prepare these leaders for jobs dealing with joint matters. The study draws on interviews and focus groups with a select group of senior people who have served at the highest executive levels of DoD.

Senior Civilian Executives

Senior civilian executives (i.e., members of the Senior Executive Service, or SES) are a significant and important portion of DoD’s executive leadership team—in 2006, there were 38 percent more SES members than general/flag officers in the active component. Many of these executives formulate policy options and provide oversight for programs that apply across DoD, including the military services, the Joint Staff, and the combatant commands. The RAND study indicates that SES members are generally top performers but that many lack “joint savvy.” Interviewees stressed

Abstract

Leaders across the Total Force must be prepared for a growing range of joint military operations. This study found that many senior DoD executives, reserve component general/flag officers, and senior noncommissioned officers lack appropriate joint experience, education, and training. Inadequate funding and the absence of management systems to track and facilitate joint experience are common obstacles that impede the acquisition of joint acumen.

that, prior to joining the SES, promising mid-career executives need a greater breadth of experience to equip them with an understanding of how an organization fits with broader operational and strategic goals and objectives. Once they become SES members, they need education and training to gain a deeper understanding of the processes involved in developing and allocating resources to support the National Security and National Military Strategies as well as specifically tailored courses in national security, public policymaking, strategic leadership, and strategic-level management.

General/Flag Officers in the Reserve Component

Since 2001, more than 580,000 guardsmen and reservists have been called up, and they are participating in military operations that are more joint than ever before. General/flag officers (G/FOs) in the reserve components comprise a substantial portion of our nation’s military leadership, with one in five joint G/FO billets being filled by members of the reserve components.

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Even G/FOs in the reserve components who are not serving in joint billets increasingly experience jointness: They are tapped to command multiservice and multinational forces or to lead joint task forces for domestic emergencies. While all interviewees stressed the high quality of G/FOs in the reserve components, they indicated that traditional field-grade assignments and military education for G/FOs in these components do not adequately prepare officers for joint responsibilities. For example, there are insufficient slots for integrated active component–reserve component in-residence courses, and active component–reserve component training is inadequately integrated. Consequently, G/FOs in the reserve component may find themselves placed in joint staff positions without a full grasp of joint language and processes.

Senior Noncommissioned Officers

The officer corps depends on senior NCOs to train, coach, and mentor their subordinates—they represent the pinnacle of the enlisted ranks and could become a tremendous resource for helping instill jointness in the enlisted force across the military services. In general, our interviewees felt the quality of individuals selected for joint senior NCO leadership positions was quite good, but they all strongly expressed their belief that the performance of the broader joint senior NCO population suffers from a lack of training in joint matters and familiarity with other services' structures, protocols, procedures, and cultures. Parent-service support for developmental assignments earlier in the NCO career path is lacking, and joint education and training for senior NCOs is insufficient in quality and quantity. For example, no joint senior enlisted academy exists; moreover, no DoD-wide curriculum for educating service members on the fundamentals of joint operations exists. Accordingly, the content of instruction varies between and among the service NCO academies. These circumstances mean that senior NCOs must grapple with steep on-the-job learning curves in joint matters.

Overarching Observations

Across the three leadership groups, interviewees consistently emphasized that a large portion of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that characterize effective leadership in the joint arena is comparable to that in nonjoint positions, whether within the services or in another component of DoD. Nevertheless, they also suggested that senior leaders serving in joint posi-

tions need *additional* competencies that relate to a joint perspective, optimizing joint capability, and the operational and strategic art of joint warfare. However, the lack of purposeful development in joint matters has caused many of these senior leaders to lack appropriate “joint acumen.” 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

Many of the recommendations proposed in this study are already being addressed by OSD, the Joint Staff, and such service initiatives as Developing 21st-Century DoD Senior Executive Service Leaders, Strategic Plan for Transforming DoD Training Reserve Component JPME [Joint Professional Military Education] Beyond Phase I, and the Keystone Program for Senior Enlisted Leaders.

To create a larger pool of joint-qualified SES members, G/FOs in the reserve component, and senior NCOs, the authors recommend developing additional initiatives in the following areas:

For SES members:

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

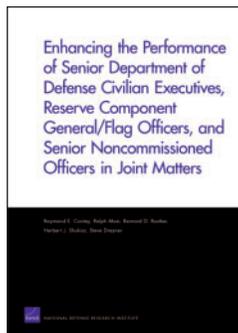
For G/FOs in the reserve component:

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

For senior NCOs:

- more and earlier training in joint matters
- 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.

The authors also indicate that the next step, which was beyond the scope of this research, would be to conduct appropriate cost-benefit analyses of possible initiatives. ■



This research brief describes work done for the RAND National Defense Research Institute and documented in *Enhancing the Performance of Senior Department of Defense Civilian Executives, Reserve Component General/Flag Officers, and Senior Noncommissioned Officers in Joint Matters*, by Raymond E. Conley, Ralph Masi, Bernard D. Rostker, Herbert J. Shukiar, and Steve Drezner, MG-621-OSD, 2008 (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG621/>), 102 pp., \$35.00, ISBN: 978-0-8330-4500-3. This research brief was written by Susan Woodward. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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