

## **Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 100: Missing the Point: Why the Reforms of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Won't Improve U.S. Defense Policy**

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### **Executive Summary**

On September 30, 1986, the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 became law, thus marking the end of one cycle and the beginning of another in the long-standing debate about how to organize America's military forces and command structure.[1] Goldwater-Nichols was the culmination of more than four years of passionate, often bitter debate dating from 1982 when former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. David C. Jones called for fundamental change in the operation of the JCS.[2]

The reorganization act dealt with many issues, but the JCS reforms were the most significant.[3] The reforms may result in some short-term improvements, such as clarifying the functions of the JCS chairman and the joint chiefs' role in the command and employment of combatant forces. In the long run, however, policymakers will still confront the same dilemmas as before, because the JCS reforms do not address the fundamental problem of U.S. defense policy: i.e., the increasing mismatch between foreign policy goals and resources to meet those goals.

More than a year after the passage of the legislation, it appears that claims of both its supporters and its critics were exaggerated. Adm. William J. Crowe, Jr., perhaps said it best when he commented, "It isn't as great as the advocates said it would be and it won't be as bad as the critics thought." [4]

Criticizing the JCS has become somewhat of a national pastime, one that cuts across ideological and party boundaries.[5] Yet arguments about how to organize it can be traced back to its inception. As former assistant secretary of defense Lawrence Korb once wrote,

The Joint Chiefs of Staff is one of the most controversial bodies in the American political system. Yet it is probably one of the least understood. One author places the JCS on a par with the National Security Council in the decision-making process, while another feels that the JCS has as much impact in the policy process as does a group of cadets studying political science at West Point.[6]

However one feels about the performance of the JCS, one cannot say that it has not been scrutinized over the years. Between 1944 and 1982, 20 studies on how to restructure the JCS were conducted.[7] Indeed, in the past four years alone, hundreds of articles in the news media, reports and studies by public policy groups, and congressional hearings have been devoted to the subject.[8] To understand the criticisms of the JCS, one must examine the circumstances that led to its creation and post-World War II development.

### **History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff**

Shortly after the United States entered World War II, President Roosevelt informally created the JCS to work with the British Joint Chiefs of Staff. All the plans for postwar unification of the services (part of the emerging trend toward greater centralization in all large organizations) took for granted that the JCS would continue to exist. Only two years after the war, Congress passed the National Security Act of 1947, the revised version of which is the cornerstone of our current national security establishment. Essentially, the act was a compromise between those who favored full integration of the services and those who feared centralization of military authority.

The National Security Act empowered the JCS to prepare strategic plans and provide strategic direction of the military forces. In addition, the JCS was instructed to prepare joint logistic plans and assign each military service logistic responsibilities in accordance with such plans as well as to establish unified commands in strategic areas where such commands were in the interest of national security.[9]

Continued interservice rivalries prompted Secretary of Defense James Forrestal to issue a memorandum of "Functions of the Armed Forces and the Joint Chiefs of Staff," worked out with the JCS in 1948. His memorandum was intended to encourage interservice cooperation by specifying the missions of each service. In practice, however, it was a failure.[10]

In 1953 President Eisenhower submitted a reorganization plan that affected the JCS in several ways. While the net effect of these changes was to strengthen the authority of the chairman to manage the Joint Staff, the JCS as a corporate body retained control over the Joint Staff.

Eisenhower's plan also called for a major change in the chain of command. Forrestal's 1948 memorandum had given the JCS authority to designate one of its members as its executive agent for a unified command, thus creating the impression that it was in the chain of command, and in practice it had functioned as though that were the case. The 1953 revision sought to restore the intent of the 1947 act that the joint chiefs would function as advisers and planners but not directly as commanders. In the last major reorganization of the Defense Department in 1958, the chairman was made a voting member of the JCS, but the Joint Staff was prohibited from functioning as a general staff and from exercising any executive authority (the latter being primarily a response to the perceived influence of the German general staffs of World Wars I and II).

Expressing dissatisfaction with the changes made in 1953, Eisenhower once again made changes in the chain of command. It was to run "from the President to the Secretary of Defense and through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the commanders of the unified and specified commands." It was generally understood that "through" implied that the joint chiefs would be transmitters, not originators, of command orders.

In sum, the history of the JCS indicates that the central issue has never been choosing between change and the status quo. Rather, it has been determining the nature and pace of the change.

Although the responsibilities of the JCS remained fundamentally the same between 1958 and 1986, organizational changes in the Joint Staff were made to promote better management and to meet increased national security demands. As John Frisbee noted, however, the JCS has remained the misfit of the national security apparatus.

Throughout the post-World War II years, the Joint Chiefs of Staff has been little understood by the general public; frequently criticized for performing as the Congress intended it to perform (i.e., as an advisory committee concerned with military factors of national security policy); often blamed for decisions over which it had little or no control; and seldom praised for the genuine contributions it has made to the management of defense affairs.[11]

In recent years the negative consequences of a number of events have served as a catalyst for further revising the JCS. These include the loss of the Vietnam War, North Korea's capture of the Pueblo, the Khmer Rouge's seizure of the Mayaguez, the failed attempts to rescue prisoners of war at Son Tay and American hostages in Iran, the bombing of the marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983, and the intervention in Grenada. Defense analyst William Lind, for example, criticized the JCS's insistence on involving each of the four services in the Grenada invasion:

One early plan for the invasion . . . would have produced something much closer to a coup de main. . . . This plan was overruled by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who demanded that all four services be involved--just as in the Iran rescue

mission. The Army was anxious to give its Rangers a piece of the action to justify its request for a third Ranger battalion and a Ranger regimental headquarters, while the overall command for specialized, commando-type forces wanted a chance to show what it could do. So in what seems to have become the standard JCS approach to military operations, one that turns them into a pie-dividing contest among all the services, we ended up with a plan that allowed the enemy to put on a reasonably good show.[12]

Regarding Vietnam, memories of past debates within the JCS stifled candid advice that might have led to a much earlier end to the war. Gen. Bruce Palmer wrote that "not once during the war did the JCS advise the commander-in-chief or the secretary of defense that the strategy being pursued most probably would fail and that the United States would be unable to achieve its objectives." [13]

### **The Campaign to Reform the JCS**

The persistent failures of the JCS over the course of 15 years contributed to a feeling among the defense community that it was time for another major change. But it was not until retiring JCS chairman David Jones made public his suggestions for change in 1982 that the issue became the center of a sustained national debate. Because his call for reform was so influential, it is worthwhile to examine it in detail.

### **The "Dual Hatting" Problem**

As a JCS member, a chief of a service is called upon to transcend his own service's interests and develop policy advice from a unified military perspective--a "national" viewpoint. Yet as a chief of a service, the same individual is looked upon as its principal advocate.

Theoretically, although not legally, joint responsibilities are supposed to take precedence over service responsibilities. In reality, top officers' primary loyalty lies with their respective parent services, which provide them with a political and budgetary power base that a relatively abstract group such as the JCS could not duplicate. One analysis noted,

Political and industrial pressure groups can gain much more from the Services than they can from the JCS, measured in tangible terms like money from weapon procurement and military installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have no semiformal affiliates such as Associations of the United States Army and Air Force or Navy and Marine Corps Leagues.[14]

Bilateral loyalties also put America's top military advisers in a difficult position:

No Chief could rationally advocate additional divisions, ships or planes as a Service spokesman, then recommend reductions during JCS review. . . . Siding with his Service might temporarily imperil a Chief's rapport with JCS compatriots, but disapproving proposals by his Service even once on important matters could cost him permanent loss of its confidence.[15]

Another aspect of this problem is that both roles carry heavy responsibilities and demand considerable time. Chiefs can rarely carry out the demands of one job, let alone both.

### **Desire for Unanimity**

Jones also cited a desire for unanimity as an obstacle to effective JCS operation. In practice, the JCS believes that its recommendations carry more weight if they reflect the agreement of all the chiefs. Rather than offer policy alternatives, the chiefs consider it their responsibility to debate the options and refine them into a single recommendation. The services, therefore, can frustrate an agreement on most Joint Staff actions. Jones described the advice provided by the JCS as "not crisp, timely, very useful or very influential. And that advice is often watered down and issues are papered over in the interest of achieving unanimity." He concluded that the "resulting lack of credibility has caused the national leadership to look elsewhere for recommendations that properly should come from the JCS." [16]

Robert Komer, former undersecretary of defense for policy, expressed that view even more bluntly:

Because of the way it operates, the JCS system is the prisoner of the services which comprise it. The rule of unanimity which the JCS deliberately impose on themselves in order to achieve a unified view vis-a-vis the civilians permits in effect a single service veto. This means in turn that JCS advice on any controversial issue almost invariably reflects the lowest common denominator of what the services can agree on.[17]

### **Limited Independent Authority of the JCS Chairman**

The limited independent authority of the JCS chairman is a paradox. The chairman is the only JCS member who devotes all of his time to joint affairs. He generally has more influence but less control than a service chief. Although he outranks all other military officers, the chairman does not exercise command over the JCS or the armed forces but acts as an adviser, a moderator, an implementer, and an integrating influence whenever possible. One study group concluded:

His potential effectiveness is, by law and by practice, curtailed. As one of five equals he cannot speak authoritatively for the other members of the JCS as a corporate body unless they all agree or he states the positions of the individual Service Chiefs; he is not the "chairman of the board." Unlike the Service Chiefs, he manages few resources and resources are an important source of influence. With regard to personnel, he controls no promotions and few assignments, so has little sway over the officers assigned to the Joint Staff and other Joint organizations, including the Unified Commands.[18]

### **Limited Joint Experience of JCS Members**

Neither experience nor education has equipped most joint chiefs to perform well in the joint arena. Joint assignments are not considered steppingstones to success. They divert officers from the mainstream of their respective military services into channels where duties may even conflict with narrow service interests.

John Collins noted that such narrow service interests are nurtured by the "we versus they" syndrome that starts in the service academies with such slogans as "Beat Army" and "Beat Navy." Collins also commented that "those previously exposed to joint concept formulation that interlocked political, economic, land, sea, and aerospace power from perches in the Pentagon could almost literally be counted on the fingers of two hands." [19] Jones made the same point: "The Chiefs of Staff of the services almost always have had duty on service staffs in Washington but almost never on the Joint Staff. Few incentives exist for an officer assigned to joint duty to do more than punch his or her ticket, and then get back into a service assignment." [20] Certainly, if the mandate of the JCS is to include its traditional function of planning for combined arms campaigns, then it is imperative to assign officers to joint planning roles, and as early in their careers as possible.

### **Disincentives for OJCS Officers**

Military officers who serve in the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff likewise face a conflict between their service interests and their Joint Staff work. Service interests play a dominant role in OJCS staff work; the joint perspective is relegated to a secondary role. That is particularly the case on the Joint Staff. One study declared that "the officers who serve on the Joint Staff have strong incentives to protect the interests of their services. . . . Joint Staff officers usually serve only a single tour there, and must look to their parent service for promotions and future assignments. Their performance is judged in large part by how effectively they have represented service interests." [21]

General Jones's wide-ranging proposals for reform angered many people. They included

strengthening the position of the JCS Chairman in two areas: [in] providing advice to the National Command Authorities, and in command and control of joint operations. . . . Specific recommendations [included] greater control over the Joint Staff, appointment of a vice or deputy chairman from a service other than the Chairman's, a greater role for combatant/ joint commanders in the policy formulation and resource allocation process, new emphasis on joint assignments and preparation of military and naval officers for joint duty.[22]

Some, however, including Gen. Edward Meyer, a JCS member with Jones, suggested that the chairman had not gone far enough in his recommendations for change. Among other things, Meyer recommended the creation of a national

military advisory council to serve as full-time advisers to the president and the secretary of defense. He believed that this would end the problem of "dual hatting" because the more trusted and professional the advice, the more willing civilian authorities would be to seek it.[23]

## **Unified and Specified Commands**

Yet another area involving the JCS is the unified and specified commands, established to control operations whenever military forces are employed. Unified commands have forces assigned from two or more services; specified commands consist of forces from a single service.

One study identified six broad areas of problems with the unified and specified commands:

First, the chain of command from the Commander in Chief to the operational commanders is confused. . . . Second, the authority of the unified commanders over their Service components is weak. Third, there is an imbalance between the responsibilities and accountability of the unified commanders and their ability to obtain the mix of resources that they need to fulfill the missions. The fourth problem area is the absence of unification below the level of the unified commander and his staff. Fifth, the Unified Command Plan does not receive an objective review. Last, there has been an unnecessary micro-management of tactical operations and circumvention of the chain of command by the National Command Authority (President and Secretary of Defense) during crises.[24]

One must keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of reforming the JCS is to eliminate organizational and procedural problems that prevent it from carrying out its responsibilities. The views of the JCS often lack timeliness, clarity, and unity of purpose. Senior civilian officials, therefore, often rely on civilian staffs for advice that should be provided by professional military officers. A consequence of this denigration of JCS advice is an obsession with tactical details at the cost of the neglect of strategic questions. President Lyndon Johnson's lying on the floor of the Oval Office, picking out bombing targets for fighters from aerial photos spread on his rug is a notorious example. The objective of JCS reforms is to increase the organization's efficiency so it can be entrusted with missions that properly fall under its jurisdiction, not to give it more influence or power per se.

## **Reform Controversies**

Although the objectives might have been modest, the results were to prove exceedingly controversial. Shortly after the initial calls for change to the JCS, the battle was joined. Predictably, the navy and the marine corps--with their determination to maintain their tradition of independence--vehemently opposed any organizational change in the JCS and its staff. For example, Chief of Naval Operations Thomas Hayward testified before Congress that he was "deeply offended by the slanderous criticisms which one frequently hears about the Joint Chiefs being an ineffective group of parochial Service Chiefs who spend most of their time bickering among themselves, horse trading to preserve turf and what is best for their Service." [25]

John Kester, former special assistant to Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, in commenting on a reorganization bill that gave the JCS chairman more power at the expense of the secretary of defense, said it "would benefit the patient about as much as a witch doctor's prescribing an application of leeches." [26]

The argument that JCS reform would lead to the establishment of a "provincial Prussian-style military leadership" is little more than a straw man.[27] Most such arguments focus on the Prussian-German general staffs of the period 1807-1945, ignoring the fact that other democratic nations with large military establishments, such as France, Great Britain, and the Federal Republic of Germany, have adopted some form of a general staff. Even the United States did so in the past. Vehement objections to the general staff concept are based on the assumption that such an organization would threaten American political democracy.[28] Modern scholarship, however, suggests that the power and prestige of the German general staff were more a product of Prussian or German militarism than a creator of it.

Furthermore, in World War II the German general staff did not attempt to control national policies. It was absolutely dominated by Adolf Hitler. Col. T. N. Dupuy, a military historian, wrote:

There is absolutely no evidence that general staffs have in any way eroded civilian control of the armed forces in any

nation. They have been subservient to autocrats when they have been created in autocratic societies; they have ably defended liberty when they have been implanted in democracies. The general staff most noted of all, that of Germany, twice attempted to substitute democracy for autocracy in an autocratic society, but failed on both occasions because the autocracy was too entrenched.[29]

Legitimate objections to the general staff concept are probably cultural and psychological. All the missions of a general staff--to prepare for war, based on the assumption that there will be another war; conduct systematic long-range planning; and do both in an atmosphere of relative secrecy--fly in the face of the traditional American qualities of optimism (there need not be another war), ad hoc pragmatism (longrange planning is an undemocratic narrowing of options by technocrats), and openness (the public has the "right to know").

Throughout U.S. history there have been occasions when military commanders exceeded their authority or disagreed with civilian political leaders. Nevertheless, their actions did not subvert the constitutional principle of civilian control of the military.[30] Popular as the Dr. Strangelove image may be, instances of American commanders overstepping the bounds of their authority have been rare. General MacArthur's actions in Korea came close to constituting an attempt at military usurpation, but they were more a case of insubordination than of exceeding his authority.

### **Congress and the JCS**

The attitude of Congress toward the JCS has always been essentially manipulative. As Kester wrote, "Congress has appeared happy to have the JCS remain a weak, compromise organization. The congressional debates on the National Security Act of 1947 and its periodic amendments clearly opposed a powerful central military staff or a single uniformed commander." [31]

A zero-sum perspective is evident in many of the services' objections to strengthening the JCS. In particular, the navy and the marine corps seem to believe that changes such as granting more influence to the JCS chairman can only come at the expense of their autonomy, budgets, and ability to advise. Such concerns were heeded in Congress. In the 97th Congress, the navy and its friends in the Senate were able to prevent the passage of legislation that would strengthen the authority of the JCS chairman. What those who voice such objections overlook is that designating the chairman the principal military adviser isn't intended to reduce the diversity of military views available to political decision makers. Rather, the goal is to supplement service-based military advice with advice from a cross-service perspective. To ease the fears of the other services, however, Congress adopted certain safeguards.

First, in formulating joint positions, the chairman is required to consult fully with other members of the JCS. The purpose is to ensure that they are informed of the content of the chairman's recommendations and that the chairman's advice benefits from their expertise. The service chiefs retain their right of dissent.

Second, on crucial national issues such as arms control treaties and proposed uses of military force, the chairman is required to provide civilian leaders with the individual positions of all the service chiefs if they differ from his recommendation.

Some members of Congress and independent analysts have doubted that service chiefs are bold enough to tell their civilian superiors that they disagree, but recent experience indicates otherwise. In the aftermath of the Reykjavik summit and the disclosure of U.S. arms sales to Iran, the chiefs made it known that they disagreed with both the proposal to eliminate long-range ballistic missiles and the proposal to sell arms and would have said so had they been consulted. On the other hand, civilian leaders may feel free to ignore the JCS's advice. During the Vietnam War the JCS advocated bombing anti-aircraft missile sites in North Vietnam, but such raids were forbidden by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. After orders to bomb completed missile installations were issued, the air force suffered heavy casualties in the raids. The JCS also expressed serious doubts about the success of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba but was overridden by the CIA.

There are essentially three arguments against a strong JCS chairman, responses to all of which are embodied in the safeguards enacted by Congress. The first is that a strong chairman would limit diverse military advice to civilian leaders. This implies that the traditional JCS structure provided civilian leaders with a range of advice, but in fact that rarely happened. Adm. Thomas Moorer testified that during his tenure as chairman, "the JCS made a single

recommendation on 99 percent of the issues that came before it. To achieve this high degree of consensus, the system suppresses or dilutes valid options, and instead, presents homogenized products reflecting the lowest common denominator of service agreement." [32] The political implication of this is that the president, the National Security Council, and the secretary of defense do not turn to the JCS for professional military advice when resolving complex defense issues. As previously mentioned, such policymakers sometimes turn to uninformed sources who neglect the big picture while concentrating on tactical details.

The second argument is that a strong chairman would separate responsibility for formulating plans from the authority to execute them. The most effective plans are drafted by those who must actually implement them. Separating planning from implementation reduces the accountability of both planners and implementers. According to this argument, only the service chiefs can provide accurate assessments of the status and capabilities of the armed forces. Such an argument, however, confuses strategic and contingency planning. As William Lynn wrote,

Strategic planning requires assessments of the threat, determination of a strategy to meet the threat, and allocation of resources to fulfill the strategy. Through the Joint Strategic Planning Document (JSPD), the JCS provides the primary joint military input to this process. . . . In the sense that primary responsibility for drafting the JSPD would shift from the JCS to the chairman, the strong chairman model would separate responsibility for planning from authority for execution. But this separation exists under the current service-dominant model, because the JCS has already abdicated much of their joint planning responsibilities. The JCS has been unable to provide political leaders with force structure recommendations within existing resource constraints.

Contingency planning, on the other hand, involves the preparation of operational plans that set forth how existing forces would be used to meet specific contingencies. The JCS has responsibility for coordinating this planning. But the unified and specified commands, not the military services, have the authority to prepare and execute those plans. Shifting responsibility for coordinating contingency plans from the JCS to the chairman would not separate responsibility for preparing the plans from authority for their execution. The CINCs [commanders in chief] would retain both functions. [33]

The third argument against a strong chairman is that a single, preeminent military commander would erode civilian control of the armed forces. The implicit premise of this argument is that the chairman would gain authority and influence at the expense of civilian leaders, particularly the secretary of defense. The validity of this premise is dubious. All the specific powers that critics fear might be granted to the chairman currently exist within the JCS. It is the influence that the individual services exercise on the joint system through the JCS, not the authority of the defense secretary, that the strong chairman model would reduce.

There are those who wonder whether streamlining the decision-making structure would enhance the influence, and perhaps the assertiveness, of the military as an institution. It might produce that result, but there is nothing necessarily wrong with improving the institutional influence of the military, as long as it is clearly subordinate to civilian control--and nobody has seriously argued that it isn't. The various bureaucracies that make up the U.S. government experience both the waxing and waning of their influence over time. Such fluctuations have more to do with Congress's power of the purse than with institutional efficiency.

Furthermore, the joint system has many new civilian rivals, such as the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the State Department Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, and the National Security Council staff, that are unlikely to be dominated. On the contrary, according to Lynn, "if the chairman is able to provide political leaders with military advice and planning from a broad, cross-service perspective, the strong chairman model would enhance civilian control of the military, in the practical sense [that] our leaders would better understand the implications of their decisions on defense matters." [34] For example, a strong chairman might better have conveyed to President Reagan the uneasiness the JCS felt about sending U.S. Marines to Beirut and might have been able to effect their withdrawal before they became victims of the 1983 bombing.

## **The New JCS**

The reform legislation enacted in 1986 rectified several weaknesses in the previous system. [35] For example, it specified in greater detail the functions of the JCS chairman. One of these functions, "preparing strategic plans . . .

which conform with resource levels projected by the Secretary of Defense," will, it is hoped, have the effect of making JCS advice more realistic in terms of planning what the military can actually accomplish. Thus, the JCS may be taken more seriously and its advice heeded more often.

The legislation also stated that "the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council and the Secretary of Defense." [36] However, the fears of the services other than the chairman's were eased by allowing a member of the JCS to submit to the chairman an opinion that disagrees with the chairman's advice to the president, the NSC, or the defense secretary. If another JCS member expresses a dissenting view, the chairman must present it together with his own opinion.

Another improvement is in the area of contingency planning for unified and specified commands. The chairman was specifically charged with preparing and reviewing contingency plans as well as advising the secretary of defense of problems identified during the review and establishing a standard review system for evaluating the preparedness of each command to carry out its mission. [37] Thus, the commanders in chief (CINCs) of the unified and specified commands, who are ultimately responsible for carrying out missions, have greater input into the policy planning process.

An equally valuable outcome of Goldwater-Nichols was what was not done: the JCS chairman was not made a statutory member of the NSC, as had been proposed earlier. To have done so would have violated the tradition that the military be non-political. Gen. W. Y. Smith noted,

As a member of the NSC the Chairman would tend to be perceived as a member of the Administration's political team because he would be sitting with the other statutory members. . . . It is inadvisable for him to be so perceived either at home or abroad. Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that the selection of a Chairman under these conditions could become politicized as each Administration would want to make certain it had a Chairman compatible with its outlook and objectives. This would gravely endanger our apolitical military tradition. [38]

Goldwater-Nichols also gave the chairman greater authority over the Joint Staff. He can now select its director and staff officers. Moreover, the services were required to establish joint specialty occupational categories; an officer may not be promoted to general or flag rank unless he has served in a joint duty assignment. The provisions concerning promotion and career advancement will do nearly as much to further the concept of "jointness" among the armed forces as all the other provisions combined.

A most welcome change is the clarification of the JCS's role in the chain of command and the actual employment of combatant forces (the unified and specified commands). Among the more important provisions are those that

- Clarified the JCS's role in the operational chain of command. Unless the president alters it, the chain of command runs from the president to the secretary of defense to the unified and specified combat commanders. This provision removed the ambiguous language that was a holdover from the Eisenhower years.
- Authorized the president to direct that communications between the president or the secretary of defense and the unified and specified combat commanders be run through the JCS chairman.
- Authorized the president to assign duties to the JCS chairman to assist the president and the secretary of defense in performing their command functions.
- Authorized the secretary of defense to assign responsibility to the JCS chairman for overseeing the activities of the unified and specified combatant commands.
- Specified that commanders within a unified or specified combatant command were to be under the authority, direction, and control of the unified or specified combat commander.

## **Prospects for the Future**

It is likely that the Goldwater-Nichols legislation will encourage joint operations. The new law addressed major

problems that had been repeatedly and clearly identified. It also took into account what was politically possible. Although changes more along the lines of a general staff might have been preferable, they were clearly impolitic.

No one, however, should think that the JCS's structural problems will be solved anytime soon. It will take a long time to develop the necessary corps of officers who have been trained and educated in joint specialties and to overcome the services' history of mistrust and rivalry. It will be a while before officers realize that they can "get their ticket punched" by serving in a joint specialty, although there are signs that the services are seeking to do away with severe career restrictions.[39]

Additional changes will probably be needed in the future. As previously noted, the question under debate has never been whether there should be change but rather what kind and how much. Congress and the executive branch will have to pay close attention to the JCS and the defense establishment to ensure that the changes are implemented as intended.

### **Limited Benefits of the Reforms**

Assuming that events work out as planned and future military operations indeed become more efficient, what effect, if any, will the reorganization of the JCS have on U.S. foreign policy? The answer, for various reasons, is probably little. First, there is no guarantee that the executive branch will always turn to the JCS for candid advice, even though the JCS may be willing to provide it. As we have seen, the White House did not seek JCS advice on the impact of various arms control proposals before the Reykjavik summit.[40] Nor did the White House consult the JCS about the consequences of selling arms to Iran.[41]

Second, even if the joint chiefs or other senior military officials are able to offer their views, they may well be ignored. For example, as early as the mid-1960s military leaders such as Gen. Matthew Ridgway, Gen. David Shoup, and Gen. James Gavin argued that Vietnam was a blunder from which the United States should quickly disengage.[42] Instead, bombing was escalated and more troops were committed.

Third, foreign policies are predicated on identifiable national objectives, which in turn are derived from discrete national interests. Without belaboring the obvious, such concepts are invariably ambiguous. What should one consider when formulating the national interest? Is it the power and realism of the Hans Morgenthau school of international relations, the balance of power as articulated by George Kennan, the moral values of Reinhold Niebuhr, the egoism and idealism of Robert Osgood, or the more narrow concept, which equates the national interest with national security?

An indication of how complicated the issue can become is that Donald Nuechterlein of the Federal Executive Institute devised a matrix that divided long-term American interests into four categories: defense of homeland, economic well-being, favorable world order, and promotion of values. It also defined four intensities of interest: survival, vital, major, and peripheral.[43] That sort of task has rarely been done well by anyone, military or civilian, and the reorganization of the JCS is unlikely to rectify the neglect.

Furthermore, even if one defines foreign policy as a subset of national security, as is often done, it has to satisfy competing interests overseas. Consequently, there are numerous players providing different inputs, from the secretary of state to the National Security Council. This can lead to bureaucratic decision making, in which the sheer number of organizations and agencies having a hand in foreign policy enormously complicates the direction and coordination of policymaking and results in undesirable policies.[44] Even the best possible advice from the JCS will then be just one opinion among many.

### **National Security Goals versus Resources**

Yet another reason that the reorganization of the JCS is likely to have minimal impact is the increasing mismatch between foreign policy goals and the resources needed to meet those goals. After World War II U.S. military operations reflected the fundamental objective of containing communist expansion on the Eurasian landmass to the countries occupied by Soviet armed forces at the end of the war. Toward that end the United States, as a world power, frequently deployed and employed its armed forces outside its borders. One study identified 215 incidents in which the

United States had used its armed forces for political objectives between January 1946 and December 1975.[45]

Leaving aside the question of whether such military responses were appropriate, one should note that most of them occurred in an international politico-military environment that was profoundly different from the present one. The United States was still able to exercise a preponderance of military force all over the world, which it did, without fear of serious retaliation. Yet in addition to retaining its previous commitments, the United States has taken on such new responsibilities as the Carter Doctrine, which provides for the defense of Persian Gulf oil fields.

More recently the nation left itself open to all sorts of open-ended commitments in the guise of the Reagan Doctrine, whose guiding premise seems to be, "An enemy of my enemy [i.e., the Soviet Union] is my friend." The consequence of this, as interpreted by conservatives, is that the United States is bound to aid any military force that professes to be composed of anticommunist "freedom fighters." [46] While this may be emotionally satisfying, it hardly qualifies as serious policymaking. Furthermore, such a course runs a serious risk of entangling U.S. military forces and undermining national credibility in areas that are peripheral to the national interest, however it is defined. [47] Not even a military reorganization of immensely greater magnitude and efficiency would be likely to be able to meet the challenges such a doctrine might entail. Although the JCS legislation provided for identifying deficiencies in force capabilities, there is no sign that the Reagan administration is likely to take any notice, except perhaps to call for increased military expenditures.

The enormous energies devoted to resource allocation in the Department of Defense are aimed at developing military capabilities sufficient to deter war or, if deterrence fails, to prevail. The defense secretary examines these issues in the context of drafting the annual Defense Guidance. The first major step in producing the Defense Guidance is the JCS's submission of the Joint Strategic Planning Document, which presents the JCS's view of threats to national security and its recommendations for U.S. forces over the next seven years. The JSPD, however, has traditionally been prepared with a "money is no object" attitude and therefore has not been taken very seriously. Although the JCS chairman is now charged with preparing "fiscally constrained strategic plans," it is impossible to tell what impact that will have on the JSPD. [48]

The essence of strategy at any level, as Jeffrey Record wrote, is "the tailoring of goals to resources within a specific internal and external political, military and economic environment." [49] Record might well have been speaking of the Reagan Doctrine when he wrote, "A strategy whose goals far exceed resources available for their implementation is a recipe for potential disaster." [50] Even while trying to match resources to goals, policymakers must also consider the limits to military power. No matter how powerful, there are some things military forces cannot do. Vietnam was a costly example of this.

Although the new changes to the JCS address the problems of goals and resources, it is unclear what priority they will receive. Besides requiring the JCS chairman to prepare fiscally constrained strategic plans, Goldwater-Nichols required the president to submit annually to Congress a national security strategy report that includes a comprehensive description and discussion of vital national security interests and the military's capacity to meet them. [51] In addition, the law required the secretary of defense to revise his annual report to include a discussion of major military missions as well as a justification for the missions and the military force structure. [52]

If taken seriously rather than treated as just another reporting requirement, such information could prove beneficial both in force planning and in building a public consensus for U.S. foreign policy. But it is impossible to tell what the result will be. Developments thus far have not been encouraging. The first of the required presidential reports has been released, and it repeats essentially the same generalities-- "The most significant threat to U.S. security and national interests is the global challenge posed by the Soviet Union." [53]

One problem with executive branch reports on national security is that they invariably emphasize the military elements at the expense of other issues. A realistic report on national security would at least consider the possibility that over the past seven years the United States has greatly overextended itself militarily and has created significant economic problems for itself in executing a massive military buildup.

For example, to maintain its living standards while greatly increasing its military spending, the United States used a policy of high interest rates to draw large sums--well over \$500 billion by the end of 1986--from abroad. This

absorption of world capital and savings in a generally deflationary world economy has had disturbing consequences. It has aggravated growth and development problems in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, reducing markets for U.S. and other industrialized countries' exports. Record budget deficits caused at least in part by the military buildup have swollen the national debt and created burdensome interest payments for future generations of Americans.

The above kinds of assessments are needed but are rarely forthcoming, at least from the executive branch. Government policymakers must ask how nonmilitary developments might affect national security, including long-term military capabilities, and provide some answers in their National Intelligence Estimates.

The additional descriptions in the secretary of defense's annual report are unlikely to halt such current disturbing practices as exaggerating Soviet military power, largely on the basis of static and oversimplified measures; underassessing U.S. and allied efforts; adopting strategies that, if feasible at all, are not sufficient to accomplish basic military tasks and strategies that elevate the risk of escalation needlessly (e.g., the maritime strategy); promoting excessive growth rates in dubious programs such as the Strategic Defense Initiative; tolerating wasteful redundancies such as the bomber/cruise missile leg of the strategic triad; and paying uncompetitive prices for military hardware.

### **Selection of Priorities**

The JCS appears unable to establish priorities among its overseas military missions. Its recent annual reports are replete with strategic non sequiturs; for example, the FY 1987 report stated, "Intra-regional conflict poses the risk of involving both neighboring nations and major powers outside the area. The United States must stand ready, with other nations, to deter regional conflicts or limit them should deterrence fail." [54] It then went on to admit that "U.S. forces are not available to defend simultaneously against every threat with equal strength." [55] If that is so, the U.S. government should attempt to identify missions that are of primary relevance to national security instead of trying to be a global gendarme. If this standard had been used in the past, we might never have sent marines to Beirut.

The JCS reforms will do nothing to resolve this quandary. At best the chiefs can say that they don't have enough resources to accomplish a certain objective. It is difficult for them to say that a mission is unimportant, since such a decision properly falls within the realm of the civilian political leadership. Even if the JCS decides to offer such advice, adventurous civilian leaders may ignore professional warnings about a mismatch between resources and goals.

As a superpower, the United States has undertaken global commitments. The changes to the JCS are primarily concerned with enabling American military forces to get there "first with the most." But the higher and more central responsibility is judging which commitments and wars must be undertaken, and that is the responsibility of the political leadership, not the JCS or the Department of Defense. The best military tactics can compensate only partially for an incomplete strategy. Aside from saying that the whole world is a potential theater of operations and that the mode of military activity likely in the future is low-intensity conflict, America does not appear to have much of a strategy. [56] This was implicitly conceded when the president established the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, whose mandate is to chart defense strategy for the next 20 years.

Given the fractiousness of decision making in the American democratic process, it is unreasonable to expect that policymakers will ever be able to devise a diagram that outlines alliance commitments and intervention scenarios in a nice, neat hierarchy from most to least important. James Rosenau suggested that America's leadership can be classified into such adherents of mutually exclusive belief systems as cold war internationalists, post-cold war internationalists, and neoisolationists, which makes consensus building impossible. Only by muddling through pragmatically can the nation's leadership provide direction in the near term. [57]

Nevertheless, when resources are scarce, some difficult choices must be made, and this requirement exists in the realm of defense policy as well as in the realm of economics. The United States simply can't afford to be involved in or concerned about every coup and civil war, no matter how remote to essential national security interests.

### **Conclusion**

Even now that more authority has been given to the JCS chairman and the unified and specified commanders, along with the previously described changes to the JCS, it is by no means certain that greater military efficiency and

favorable outcomes on the battlefield have been assured. Martin Van Creveld, a leading military historian wrote.

Command being so intimately bound up with numerous other factors that shape war, the pronouncement of one or more "master principles" that should govern its structure and the way it operates is impossible. No single communications or data processing technology, no single system of organization, no single procedure or method, is in itself sufficient to guarantee the successful or even adequate conduct of command in war.[58]

He went on to note,

From Plato to NATO, the history of command in war consists essentially of an endless quest for certainty--certainty about the state and intentions of the enemy's forces; certainty about the manifold factors that together constitute the environment in which the war is fought. . . . Taken as a whole, present-day military forces, for all the imposing array of electronic gadgetry at their disposal, give no evidence whatsoever of being one whit more capable of dealing with the information needed for the command process than were their predecessors a century or even a millennium ago.[59]

The overall effects of the changes made to the JCS system have been modest. Over the long term they may improve U.S. military capabilities and enhance the prospects for success on the battlefield. That, however, is a narrow perspective. By choosing to focus primarily on military effectiveness, policymakers ignore a more important dimension: national military strategy. In such a strategy military effectiveness plays a limited role. It is not enough to make sure one can fight well. One must also know what one is fighting for. As Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "The political object--the original motive for the war--will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires." [60] And making those determinations is and must remain a responsibility of the civilian political leadership. As long as policymakers continue to ignore that responsibility, the Department of Defense will continue to be known by such derisive nicknames as the "Fudge Factory" and "Fort Fumble."

## FOOTNOTES

[1] "Bill to Reorganize U.S. Armed Forces Quietly Made Law," Washington Times, October 1, 1986, p. 3.

[2] See Gen. David C. Jones, "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," Armed Forces Journal International, March 1982, pp. 68, 72.

[3] Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986: Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 3622, 99th Cong., 2d sess., H. Rept. 99-824, 1986. Other issues include revising supervisory authority for defense agencies and field activities, clarifying the chain of command for combatant commands, and specifying the secretaries of the military departments' responsibilities to the secretary of defense.

[4] Richard Halloran, "Steering an Uncharted Course," New York Times, March 2, 1987, p. A14.

[5] For a conservative critique, see Edward N. Luttwak, *The Pentagon and the Art of War: The Question of Military Reform* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984). For a liberal view, see Gary Hart (with William Lind), *America Can Win: The Case for Military Reform* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler and Adler, 1986).

[6] Lawrence J. Korb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1976).

[7] Edward C. Meyer, "The JCS--How Much Reform Is Needed?" *Armed Forces Journal International*, April 1982, p. 87.

[8] Some of the more comprehensive works on the subject are Archie D. Barrett, *Reappraising Defense Organization: An Analysis Based on the Defense Organization Study of 1977-1980* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1983); *Reorganizing America's Defense: Leadership in War and Peace*, ed. Robert J. Art, Vincent Davis, and Samuel P. Huntington (Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985); and *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, Senate Armed Services Committee Staff Report, 99th Cong., 1st sess., Committee Print 99-86, 1985.

[9] Defense Organization: Need for Change, p. 140.

[10] The memorandum, popularly known as the Key West agreement, gave each of the three services a set of primary responsibilities, and each pledged to carry out certain functions to assist in the primary missions of the other services. But interservice disputes did not end. Because each of the three services had its own programs and doctrines to protect, none of them wanted to waste valuable budget money and resources on programs designed to aid their Pentagon rivals. For a detailed account, see Morton H. Halperin and David Halperin, "The Key West Key," Foreign Policy no. 53 (Winter 1983-84): 114-30.

[11] John L. Frisbee, "New Life for JCS at Forty," Air Force Magazine, February 1982, p. 88.

[12] William S. Lind, The Grenada Operation: Report to the Congressional Military Reform Caucus (Washington: Military Reform Institute, 1984), p. 2.

[13] Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr. (Ret.), The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p. 46. See also Harry G. Summers, On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1982).

[14] John M. Collins, Elizabeth Ann Severns, and Thomas P. Glakas, U.S. Defense Planning: A Critique (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), p. 61.

[15] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[16] Defense Organization: Need for Change, p. 158.

[17] Ibid., p. 173.

[18] Ibid., p. 171.

[19] Collins, Severns, and Glakas, pp. 50-51.

[20] Defense Organization: Need for Change, p. 176.

[21] Toward a More Effective Defense: The Final Report of the CSIS Defense Organization Project (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1985), p. 12.

[22] "JCS Reorganization Prospects," Air Force Magazine, August 1982, p. 44.

[23] Meyer, p. 88.

[24] Defense Organization: Need for Change, p. 302. See pp. 303-24 for an examination of the six problem areas.

[25] Deborah Kyle and Benjamin Schemmer, "Navy, Marines Adamantly Oppose JCS Reforms Most Others Tell Congress Are Long Overdue," Armed Forces Journal International, June 1982, p. 61.

[26] John G. Kester, "Thoughtless JCS Change Is Worse Than None," Armed Forces Journal International, November 1984, p. 113.

[27] Lyman Lemnitzer et al., A Report by the Committee on Civilian-Military Relationships (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hudson Institute, 1984), p. 1.

[28] For a detailed treatment of U.S. attitudes toward a general staff, see Robert L. Goldich, The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes toward a General Staff in the 20th Century (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1985). [29] T. N. Dupuy, "Military Reform: The Case for a Centralized Command," Washington Post, June 9, 1984, p. 19.

[30] Examples include Gen. Andrew Jackson's unauthorized invasion of Florida in 1817, when it was still a Spanish possession, Gen. John C. Fremont's order that rebels' slaves be seized and freed in Missouri in 1861, Gen. Douglas MacArthur's challenge to Truman's conduct of the Korean War, and Gen. John Singlaub's condemnation of the Carter administration's proposal to withdraw U.S. ground forces from Korea. See *Defense Organization: Need for Change*, chap. 2.

[31] John G. Kester, "The Role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," in *American Defense Policy*, ed. John Reichart and Steven R. Sturm, 5th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 532.

[32] William J. Lynn, "The Wars Within: The Joint Military Structure and Its Critics," in Art, Davis, and Huntington, p. 188. [33] *Ibid.*, pp. 188-89. [34] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[35] For a complete list of the new functions of the chairman, see *Goldwater-Nichols*, pp. 17-18. [36] *Ibid.*, p. 15. [37] *Ibid.*, p. 17. [38] *Defense Organization: Need for Change*, p. 215.

[39] Richard Halloran, "A Fight on Reducing the Officer Corps," *New York Times*, March 20, 1987, p. B4.

[40] James Gerstenzang, "Had Little Summit Input, Head of Joint Chiefs Says," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1986, p. 10.

[41] George C. Wilson, "Rift Seen between Reagan, Joint Chiefs," *Washington Post*, November 25, 1986, p. 14.

[42] Bob Buzzanco, "The American Military's Rationale against the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (1986): 559-76.

[43] Donald F. Nuechterlein, *America Overcommitted: United States National Interests in the 1980s* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), p. 15.

[44] A classic work on this subject is Alexander George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980).

[45] Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1978), p. 16.

[46] For critiques of this doctrine, see Ted Galen Carpenter, "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: The 'Reagan Doctrine' and Its Pitfalls," *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* no. 74, June 24, 1986; Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "The Guns of July," *Foreign Affairs* 64, no. 4 (Spring 1986): 698-714; and George Liska, "The Reagan Doctrine: Monroe and Dulles Reincarnated," *SAIS Review* 6, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 1986): 83-98.

[47] Ironically, the Reagan Doctrine comes at a time when the goal of reducing Soviet influence around the world is already being realized, quite independently of U.S. efforts. Despite such outrageous actions as the invasion of Afghanistan, global Soviet influence is on the wane. A recent study from the Center for Defense Information noted the following: (1) The share of world power of the pro-Soviet bloc of nations is 20 percent, compared with 70 percent for the pro-Western and China bloc; (2) No nation has moved into the "Soviet-influenced" category since 1979, the longest such gap since 1950-55; (3) Except for the period 1973-74, at least one nation has fallen out of the Soviet-influenced category in every year between 1958 and 1980; (4) After World War II the Soviets had significant influence in 9 percent of the world's nations. They peaked at 15 percent in the late 1950s and have since dropped to 11 percent. Of the 164 other countries in the world, the Soviet Union has significant influence in only 18. See Stephen D. Goose, "Soviet Geopolitical Momentum: Myth or Menace? Trends of Soviet Influence around the World from 1945 to 1986," *Defense Monitor* (Center for Defense Information) 15, no. 5, 1986.

[48] To achieve a close fit between goals and resources, the Defense Department uses the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System, introduced during the Kennedy administration by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. PPBS was adopted in an attempt to allocate resources for national defense in a way that related directly to the department's mission. The cornerstone of PPBS is the identification of the war-fighting capabilities needed to meet the threat posed

to U.S. security interests.

[49] Jeffrey Record, *Revising U.S. Military Strategy: Tailoring Means to Ends* (Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984), p. 1.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Goldwater-Nichols, pp. 88-89.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[53] *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington: The White House, 1987), p. 6.

[54] *Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, United States Military Posture for FY 1987* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 2.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[56] Even works that criticize current U.S. military strategy and capabilities take as a given that the United States will increasingly need to intervene in the Third World. See, for example, *Strategic Responses to Conflict in the 1980s*, ed. William J. Taylor, Jr., Steven A. Maaranen, and Gerrit W. Gong (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1984); *Strategic Requirements for the Army to the Year 2000*, ed. Robert H. Kupperman and William J. Taylor, Jr. (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1984); and *Military Intervention in the Third World: Themes, Constraints and Options*, ed. John H. Maurer and Richard H. Porth (New York: Praeger, 1984).

[57] See James N. Rosenau, "Fragmegrative Challenges to National Strategy," in *Understanding U.S. Strategy: A Reader*, ed. Terry L. Heyns (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1983), pp. 65-82.

[58] Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 261.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 264-65. Another recent excellent work in this area, albeit more technical, is John H. Cushman, *Command and Control of Theater Forces: Adequacy* (Washington: AFCEA International Press, 1985).

[60] Carl von Clausewitz, *On war*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 81.