U.S. Navy (Jeffrey Viano)

Emergence of the Joint Officer

By HOWARD D. GRAVES *and* DON M. SNIDER

Both the form and substance of professional military education (PME) have been subjected to basic and revolutionary reforms in recent years. The farsighted Goldwater-Nichols Act, though hotly debated and strongly resisted at the time of its passage, mandated and catalyzed this change. Initially the law had little appeal to the military departments. Today each service accepts, indeed embraces, these reforms because their contribution to the effectiveness of joint warfare outweighs the new burdens which they have admittedly placed on the services.[1]

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PME reforms were the result of two profound and complementary thrusts found in title IV of Goldwater-Nichols that dealt with officer personnel policy. The first, which addressed form or process, created joint specialty officers (JSOs) and imposed criteria for their selection, education, utilization, and promotion. The second, one of substance, revamped the content of military science as it applies to the education of JSOs through its focus on emerging joint doctrine.

Recalling that the military is defined, as well as delimited, by its expertise in military science and that this expertise is an intrinsic part of the self-concept of the officer corps and its relationship to the state, it is easy to see the prescient mutual significance of these two new thrusts in PME. Together, they have produced joint officers of a kind rarely before found in our military institutions and culture. Some

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may disagree with this characterization by pointing out that Goldwater-Nichols only defined new duty positions and educational requirements. But they misunderstand the revolutionary nature of what has occurred in the joint arena over the last ten years—the clear emergence of a new culture among the leaders of the Armed Forces.

This new culture is truly joint. It is evidenced in the experiences of officers who have been educated and served in joint billets, many during operations in Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia.[2] The reforms introduced under Goldwater-Nichols are not the sole cause of this emerging joint culture, but they were vital in facilitating the learning experience through which it is being nurtured.

Joint culture continues to emerge. Its ultimate impact on the individual services is not yet fully known, nor is the ethos it advocates. One outcome appears certain: the next logical steps in the evolution of joint PME will present serious challenges. As we face them, it is vital—especially for younger officers—to recall that the Armed Forces successfully adapted to new realities under title IV of the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

Influences on PME

The principal changes brought about in joint PME under Goldwater-Nichols include actions that:

- established the Chairman as principal adviser to the President and Secretary of Defense on all military issues including PME (previously the domain of the corporate JCS)
- defined "joint matters" for educational and other purposes as relating to the integrated employment of land, sea, and air forces in the areas of national military strategy, strategic and contingency planning, and command and control of combat operations under unified command, whereas before they were not clearly defined and traditionally included only joint planning
- created a JSO career track to improve the quality and performance of officers assigned to joint duty; mandated that critical positions identified in joint organizations be filled only with JSOs contingent upon their completion of joint PME
- mandated maintaining "rigorous standards" at joint PME institutions for educating JSOs, where previously there had been neither joint educational programs nor required standards
- mandated promotion policy objectives for officers in joint duty assignments, objectives directing that as a group these officers should be promoted at a rate comparable to officers serving on service staffs in the military departments
- required newly promoted flag and general officers to attend the Capstone course, which is designed specifically to prepare them to work with all the services
- designated a PME focal point in the vice director, Operational Plans and Interoperability (J-7), Joint Staff, who is dual-hatted as the deputy director, Joint Staff, for military education and oversees the Military Education Division (J-7).

Moreover, a program for joint education has evolved into a PME framework which relates five educational levels to career phases (namely, precommissioning, primary, intermediate, senior, and general/flag officer), each with its own mandated learning areas and objectives.[3]

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These provisions, with others too numerous to detail here, linked assignments, education, and promotion potential to joint duty. The law had remarkable effects on service policies relating to professional development. The services had to adjust traditions, particularly the convention that officers did not serve outside their service nor their tight-knit career specialty lest they fall behind their contemporaries who remained in the service's mainstream.

To effect change in the services, Goldwater-Nichols needed to define the nature of joint officer development and create institutional incentives sufficient to promote its ultimate legitimacy.[4] As indicated, it did this initially by linking assignments, education, and later promotion potential. In subsequent years, the effectiveness of joint combat operations has been even more powerful in persuading officers that joint duty is both personally fulfilling and career enhancing.

Institutional Costs

The services have adapted to the new realities of Goldwater-Nichols, but not without costs. The requirement to assign promising officers to joint billets who otherwise would receive positions which their service deemed important to its own missions has complicated personnel management. The increased quality of officers serving in joint assignments resulted in a corresponding decline in the overall quality of service headquarters and operational staffs, a cost more quickly recognized by some services than others. Further complications have arisen over the time officers spend outside their services for joint PME and in joint duty assignments, which in many cases now approaches 20 percent of professional careers.

The third cost has been an unrelenting increase in the number of joint billets, more than 10 percent over the last six years alone, a period in which the services markedly reduced their strength in officers. Lastly, inflexibility in managing JSO assignments and increased turbulence because of the requirement to attend phase II of the program for joint education (PJE) during twelve weeks in residence at the Armed Forces Staff College constitute ongoing costs to the services.

Notwithstanding their expense, these reforms have been so fruitful that on balance the result has been the emergence of a new joint culture. America's evolving approach to warfare, which is increasingly joint in all respects, has been supported, even led and facilitated, by officers professionally educated and employed under Goldwater-Nichols.

Ultimately, the benefit of PME reforms must be measured against the performance of the Armed Forces in defending and furthering national interests. In this case the record is clear: better officers, better prepared for joint force employments, with markedly better results in integrating service capabilities on the battlefields and in regional conflicts.

With so much successful adaptation over the past decade, is joint PME now established for the decades ahead?

If not, what issues should occupy those responsible for preparing officers for joint duty? Two broad sets of ongoing changes in the security environment create challenges for designers of joint PME. The first relates to future missions of the Armed Forces—those purposes for which the Nation will employ the military in the next millennium. The second centers on the response of Western democracies, including the United States, to a new security environment and its implications for civil-military relations.

Future Missions

With respect to missions of the future, it would appear that within the residual, state-centric international system, conflicts among major powers will be the exception.[5] But nonstate actors have increasingly created capabilities which endanger U.S. and allied interests in widely separated regions. Threats exist along two vastly different segments of the conflict spectrum: at the low end with operations other than war (OOTW), and at the high end—beyond conventional war as seen in regions like the Persian Gulf—through the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), some potentially to nonstate actors. Recent OOTW missions which have involved joint forces—in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia, Liberia—contrast sharply with the focus of the Cold War era and the regional conflict in the Gulf that immediately followed it. But in fact they have been the normal missions of the Armed Forces save for the historical anomaly of the Cold War.[6]

The need to be prepared for vastly contrasting missions—from OOTW to regional war with WMD or a return to major power competitions—poses significant challenges for joint PME. First, since OOTW missions do not usually involve our vital interests (with the exception of international terrorism), the polity will expect them to be achieved without casualties and other costs which are not commensurate with the significance of those interests. Thus these missions must be conducted swiftly and efficiently, with even a higher premium on preconflict integration of service capabilities and joint training readiness. Furthermore, they are likely to have limited objectives and be of short duration, creating the aura of constabulary missions.[7]

55th Signal Company, Combat Camera (Brian Gavin)

Medics carrying wounded Haitian.

The tensions within these evolving missions already are, and will continue to be, quite real for officers. Will core competencies and self-concepts be focused on the role of the warrior or on that of the constable and peacekeeper? Most OOTW missions have also called for decentralized mission execution. This dispersion requires greater political-military sophistication in younger officers, to include direct contact with the media, non-governmental organizations, and foreign governments, as well as coping with the inherent ambiguities and complexities of such international operations.

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Such missions also require officers of exemplary character since the ambiguities and complexities of international operations often have a moral-ethical character, and joint commanders must work with foreign officers whose culture and institutions reflect a different value orientation.

Since the Nation will always rightly expect that its Armed Forces be prepared across the full spectrum of potential conflict, the success of future adaptations of joint PME may well depend on how this dilemma is resolved. The challenge will consist of further developing competencies for new, limited missions while enhancing joint warfighting—a daunting task given the likelihood of continuing resource constraints. This brings us to the second set of ongoing changes that will influence joint PME—the nature of the responses by democratic governments, including the United States, to changes in security imperatives.

A New Environment

Democratic responses can be aggregated into four areas, each diverging sharply from the patterns of the past five decades, and with some quite important differences between America and its allies. First, the resources being allocated to national security have been sharply reduced and will remain so until a new threat to our vital interests emerges for which elected governments can extract the necessary resources from internally oriented publics.[8] Coupled with the requirement for political legitimacy in the use of military force, as observed in the Gulf War and Bosnia, this means that Western democracies will fight future conflicts with political-military coalitions.[9]

Secondly, unlike the Cold War era of long-standing coalitions, the future norm will consist of ad hoc and conditional commitments by democratic governments, again as seen in the Gulf War and recent OOTW missions. The implications for joint PME are clear. For every joint concept, doctrine, or course, the United States must develop

The Desirability of Joint Duty—1982

Joint assignments are seldom sought by officers. A joint position removes them from the environment for which they have been trained, in which they have established relationships and reputations, and in which they seek advancement. It places them instead in a wholly new environment involving unfamiliar procedures and issues for which most of them have little or no formal training. Their fitness reports (which affect their careers and prospects for advancement) are often entrusted to officers of other services with little in common by way of professional background.

Adding to these concerns is the perception that much of the work on the Joint Staff is unproductive, and that too much effort is wasted on tedious negotiation of issues until they have been debased and reduced to the "lowest common level of assent."

The general perception among officers is that a joint assignment is one to be avoided. In fact, within one service it is flatly believed to be the "kiss of death" as far as a continued military career is concerned. In contrast, service assignments are widely perceived as offering much greater possibilities for concrete accomplishments and career enhancement. As a result, many fine officers opt for service assignments rather than risk a joint-duty assignment. Yet joint positions have the potential for making major contributions to the defense effort, and offer challenging work to the finest officers.

—Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Study Group,
The Organization and Functions of the JCS (1982)

parallel combined capabilities in concert with its allies. Those responsible for joint PME should urgently consider the profound implications of the rapid internationalization of U.S. military institutions and processes.

The third response is the evolving specialization in U.S. military capabilities vis-à-vis those of our allies. Basically, Washington has indicated its intention to maintain a high-tech competitive advantage—in pursuit of a revolution in military affairs (RMA)—whereas other nations, with the possible exception of France and Japan, have eschewed such a role. Unfortunately, any intention to adapt and reshape the Armed Forces through an RMA is unresourced as yet. Further, developments to date indicate an asymmetric application of RMA capabilities across the conflict spectrum, with few benefits for OOTW, currently the most frequent grounds for employing joint capabilities.

Since joint PME operates at the intersection of intellectual development and operational art, adapting to an RMA requires the formation of officers who are analytic, pragmatic, innovative, and broadly educated.[10] History teaches that effective PME—though insufficient by itself—has proven to be necessary for military innovation, experimentation, and adaptation. This resulted primarily when PME provided the dual benefits of training in new factual knowledge as well as influencing officer attitudes and perceptions toward fundamental shifts in military doctrine and organization.[11] But the success of such investments in human capital is problematic at best given the political clout of congressional-industrial interests that favor spending on defense hardware and software. Thus, only at senior levels where the civilian and military leadership make these trade offs can the specific challenge from a potential RMA to joint PME be met.

In the fourth area of response, our allies have significantly reshaped their force structures, in some cases even making changes in reserves and conscription, although America has done little. The most notable examples are Britain and France, who have extensively reduced and reorganized their militaries. France even announced the end of obligatory national service.

Collectively, the implications of these responses for PME—at service, joint, and combined levels—are ominous. Just as role specialization, a potential RMA, and sharp declines in resources are making adaptation, innovation, and reshaping more critical to military institutions—processes historically facilitated by PME—the Armed Forces are heavily engaged in missions for which they are relatively least suited, consuming even greater shares of declining resources. This is more true of the most critical asset for change: the focus of senior military leaders.[12] Thus, unless resourced and nurtured by them, PME may regress from the notable strides made under Goldwater-Nichols.[13]

Overarching Challenges

Regardless of which future unfolds, those responsible for PME will face two transcending and thus key challenges. The first is retaining the right balance between service and joint/combined PME. The second and more important is maximizing the contribution of joint PME to the moral-ethical development of officers.

At the "point of the spear" in joint warfighting are service capabilities that enable the Armed Forces to conduct land, sea, and air operations in successive and successful battles. Developing and educating officers in the integrated employment of these capabilities, joint or combined, should not serve to diminish core service capabilities. PME should not become too joint. If it does, the profession of arms could be criticized for "majoring in minors." Calls for substantial amounts of joint education down to the precommissioning level, among other initiatives, could rapidly lead to that point. By contrast, service culture and interservice competition, especially on the tactical level, are constructive aspects of maintaining an effective defense establishment.[14]

Of course such competition at higher levels has occasionally gotten out of bounds, such as when constrained resources inflame it, and perhaps could once again. On the other hand, officer education is not the most effective method to deal with perceived excesses in interservice rivalry. Effective civilian leadership, which can easily channel such competition to constructive adaptations and innovations, is a more appropriate corrective.

Civilian leadership cannot, however, effectively address the second challenge. The moral-ethical dimension of military service, vital in educating officers, is inherently part of the "contract" that the Armed Forces have maintained with the Nation. Were the

military to abrogate that pledge, as recent actions by a few officers have demonstrated, it would cease to be a profession. It would become unattractive to those who might wish to serve and unsupported by those it is dedicated to protect. Furthermore, and aside from this contract, officers have always had to act with integrity and trustworthiness. Such attributes will remain a functional requisite to mission accomplishment in a profession that unleashes violence as a team, with each member subject to unlimited liability.

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As noted, OOTW test such trustworthiness early in an officer's career. Therefore at a time when individual character is becoming less central to the society which professional officers serve, it remains of unrelenting importance to them regardless of grade or assignment. To meet that need, all services are making serious efforts to develop and maintain leader character. But such efforts are not coordinated and appear to be implemented unevenly.

Improvements in moral-ethical development are needed. Recent cases of untrustworthiness include adultery and fraternization on the part of senior officers, failure to hold officers accountable for friendly fire incidents which cost lives, personal use of government aircraft, and more intrusive "zero defect" command climates which severely test principled performance at every level. Thus, if a joint culture is emerging, it is equally clear that its ethos at the joint level is largely unarticulated and has yet to be successfully inculcated. Unfortunately, neither the new instruction issued by the Chairman on PME (CJCSI 1800.1, March 1, 1996), nor *Joint Vision 2010* even broaches the question of character development for future military leaders. In addition, this ethos is undergirded only through discrete, uncoordinated, and less than effective efforts by the services to strengthen individual character and commitment to institutional values.

An overriding need exists to imbue joint PME with an ethos which is suited to the emerging culture. The moral-ethical development of leaders, their education in character, occurs much more in the field and fleet than in academic settings. But knowledge of ethics and values, which can be conveyed through joint PME, is a necessary component of this development. PME curricula are already overflowing with good joint subject matter. That is exactly the point. For the moral-ethical development of joint officers, the military risks supplanting the essential with the good. Desiring to remain a profession, those responsible for the future of joint PME should not settle for so little.

In 1986, Congress transformed the officer corps over harsh opposition from the Pentagon. Not discounting the remarkable progress of the last decade, new difficulties have emerged for joint education. Senior military leaders should not forget the lessons of the past. The challenge now is to reshape PME—balancing the Nation's investment in its future military leaders and their character against investments in technology and forces—without relying on Congress. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] The authors are indebted to the deputy chiefs of staff for personnel of all the services for providing candid comments which assisted in the preparation of this article.

[2] Here we subscribe to the definition of organizational culture advanced by Edgar H. Schein, "Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration." See "Organizational Culture," *American Psychologist*, vol. 45, no. 2 (February 1990), pp. 109, 111.

[3] Not all the reforms summarized were mandated by the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Of particular importance was the legislation passed in 1989 as a result of the efforts of a House panel chaired by Representative Ike Skelton. See U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Report of the Panel on Military Education,* report. no. 4, 100th Cong., 1st sess., 1989.

[4] That such institutional change is possible, even predictable, is well documented. For example, see Deborah Avant, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from the Peripheral Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[5] Among many works on this subject, see Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), and Donald M. Snow, *The Shape of the Future*, 2d edition (New York: M.E. Sharpe Publishers, 1995).

[6] Samuel P. Huntington, "Nontraditional Roles for the Military," in *Noncombatant Roles for the U.S. Military in the Post Cold-War Era* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1993), pp. 3–12.

[7] For early insights on such roles, see Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), particularly chapter 20.

[8] See Don M. Snider et al., "The Coming Defense Train-Wreck . . . and What to Do About It," *The Washington Quarterly,* vol. 19, no. 1 (Winter 1996), pp. 87–127.

[9] See International Institute of Strategic Studies, "The Problem of Combat Reluctance," in *Strategic Survey, 1995–1996* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 48–57.

[10] For amplification of this point, see Steven H. Kenney, "Professional Military Education and the Emerging Revolution in Military Affairs," an unpublished paper presented at a symposium on the same subject convened at the National Defense University on May 22–23, 1995.

[11] See *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, edited by Williamson Murray and Allen R. Millett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[12] The critical role of military leaders in peacetime innovation is well documented. See Stephen P. Rosen, *Preparing for the Next War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), particularly chapters 3 and 9.

[13] General Shalikashvili is attempting to do this but has noted a lack of progress in critical areas: ". . . despite the importance we have attached to simulations, nobody has yet developed a single, fully-tested, reliable, joint warfighting model." See "A Word from the Chairman," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 6 (Autumn/Winter 1994–95), p. 7.

[14] Don M. Snider, "The U.S. Military in Transition to Jointness: Surmounting Old Notions of Interservice Rivalry," *Airpower Journal*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1996).