

# A Word from the Chairman

Today, we often take the post-Cold War successes of our Armed Forces for granted. From Haiti to Bosnia, to the Taiwan Strait, to Liberia, to the skies over Iraq, they have achieved great success at minimal cost in nearly fifty operations since Desert Storm. Quality people, superior organization, unity of command, and considerable skill in joint and combined operations have been central to that achievement. All these factors owe a great debt to the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986, whose 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary is celebrated in this issue of *JFQ*.

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while we had begun to rebuild capabilities and overcome the Vietnam syndrome, numerous events reminded us that military organization had changed little since World War II. Despite the skill and dedication of our men and

women in uniform as well as a significant percentage of national resources, we often came up short. As late as the early 1980s, notwithstanding the Reagan-era defense buildup, the Armed Forces



Visiting Aviano Air Base, Italy.

DOD (Paul Caron)

*(continued on page 4)*

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(continued from page 1)

were occasionally inefficient, even ineffective, in conducting joint operations.

In 1980, despite considerable heroism, we failed to rescue the American hostages in Iran. We aborted a troubled mission primarily due to equipment failures, but planning and organization were also problematical. In 1983 a successful rescue operation in Grenada exposed weaknesses in organizing and conducting joint operations on short-notice. We encountered severe organizational challenges at the staff level, difficulty delivering routine fire support, and problems communicating among units of different services. While the assault met with only limited resistance, it resulted in 18 Americans killed and over a hundred wounded.

The 1982 report of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Study Group on *The Organization and Functions of the JCS* documented what had become painfully obvious to operators: "The military organizations given the responsibility for the planning and execution of joint activities . . . simply [did] not have the authority, stature, trained personnel, or support needed to carry out their jobs effectively." A number of observers added that these organizational problems seemed to be an integral part of how we had gone to war throughout our history. Compounding these traditional problems was the fact that we were entering an era of short-warning operations requiring higher levels of organizational agility than we had.

On planning and programmatic issues, the Joint Chiefs from 1945 to 1985 were organized by law as a committee of equals and oriented toward consensus decisionmaking. While stronger on crisis decisionmaking, the chiefs possessed much less credibility when it came to decisions about force structure or budgets. Many Chairmen and Secretaries of Defense bemoaned the fact that, when it counted the most, the chiefs were often unable to render decisive advice on the most difficult programmatic decisions.

These organizational problems were difficult to fix. For nearly forty years, twenty major studies or commissions—including one backed by President Eisenhower—recommended changes in defense organization to foster better planning and operational effectiveness. In 1982, General David C. Jones, nearing the end of his tour as Chairman, added his name to the list of critics and reform advocates. He pushed for changes that would strengthen the Chairman's role in providing advice to the President and Secretary, create a Vice Chairman, and enhance the quality of officers assigned to Joint duty. General Edward C. Meyer, the Army chief of staff, also argued publicly in the middle of his tour for more radical changes in the way military advice was given to the National

Air Force search and rescue helicopter lifting off *USS George Washington*.



U.S. Navy (Gregg Stasza)

Command Authorities, as well as for increased powers for joint commanders in the field.

Also in 1982, the House and Senate began hearings which after five years of work resulted in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The forces against change were strong. Not only were there open and persuasive advocates of the status quo, but the effects of some changes were hard to predict and entailed considerable risk. Even the Joint Chiefs resisted many of its provisions. In the end, however,

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President Reagan supported the bill and on October 1, 1986 it became law.

From the vantage point of the mid-1990s, the act has brought about a number of changes which together have had a revolutionary impact on defense organization.

First, it made the Chairman—as opposed to the corporate body of chiefs—the principal military adviser to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Council, and President. While the chiefs remained valued advisers, this provision removed

much of the pressure for a consensus in decision-making and allowed for more flexibility and decisiveness. In a related provision, the Joint Staff became the Chairman's staff, and not the staff of the corporate JCS.

Second, the act created the position of Vice Chairman, who by law was made the second ranking officer in the Armed Forces. Later, he was also made a full member of the Joint Chiefs in his own right. Establishing this position provided continuity in joint leadership and afforded the Chairman greater flexibility. Moreover, the addition of the Vice Chairman has improved the work of the Joint Staff in many critical areas. The Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) and its associated bodies have greatly enhanced the impact of the military on budgetary and programmatic issues. Indeed, as Bill Owens and Jim Blaker have noted in this issue, JROC “represents the first major revision of the planning, programming, and budgeting system . . . since Secretary Robert McNamara put it in place more than three decades ago.”

Third, Goldwater-Nichols clarified the authority of the Chairman over strategic planning, readiness management, and joint doctrine. It charged him to assist the President and the Secretary of Defense in providing for the strategic direction of the Armed Forces. It also made him the

point of contact and spokesman for CINCs and established—with the permission of the Secretary—his oversight of them. These provisions of the law enabled the Chairman and Joint Staff to be the focal point for “jointness”—the search for common solutions to problems shared by all the services and unified commands. Jointness aims to make all the efforts of the Armed Forces greater than the sum of their parts.

Fourth, Goldwater-Nichols enhanced the powers of unified commanders over their service components and advanced their role in budgetary and programmatic processes. Thus, better unity of effort in Washington complemented improved teamwork in the field.

Finally, the law inaugurated the joint specialty officer program and increased the value of joint assignments. The quality of officers assigned to joint duty increased overnight. Today, the best personnel from all the services seek joint assignments, which has become a prerequisite for promotion to general or flag officer. In addition, Goldwater-Nichols emphasized joint professional military education. Along with subsequent legislation, it sparked numerous improvements in both intermediate and senior service colleges, as well as in the National Defense University.

In all, changes brought about by Goldwater-Nichols have improved advice to the National Command Authorities on military matters and helped to rationalize defense decisionmaking and strategic planning. The payoff came in Panama and Kuwait, as credited by General Colin Powell in the interview found in this issue.

As a result of the law, we have pioneered numerous planning documents, including a new national military strategy and more robust programmatic assessments and recommendations. Our interoperability has improved. Joint doctrine has been a major success story, with more than sixty authoritative pubs available to guide joint operations. CINCs and their components have improved the quality of joint training and exercises. Today we have a functioning joint readiness system, allowing us to monitor and manage the force’s capabilities for joint warfighting.

Most importantly, as mentioned above, the law caused changes in Washington and the field that enabled us to achieve unparalleled operational successes. As Senator Sam Nunn observes in his article, we have made more operational progress in the last ten years “than in the entire period since the need for jointness was recognized by the creation of the Army-Navy Board in 1903.” Thus, because of Goldwater-Nichols the Armed Forces can better protect our national interests at minimal cost in lives and resources. And that is the central reason why this landmark legislation is being lauded in these pages.

Yet it is not sufficient merely to praise the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The legislation pointed us toward jointness, and we must continue on that journey. Some tasks are clear. For example, as General Sheehan indicates in his article, joint training and joint force integration are top priorities. We still have some forty doctrinal pubs in the works, and unified commands are far from having perfected joint exercises. Improving the joint universal lessons learned process is also essential.

Moreover, as I stated in the last issue of *JFQ*, the most important next step toward jointness will be the implementation of *Joint Vision 2010*, the conceptual template for how the Armed Forces will channel the vitality and innovation of our people and leverage technological opportunities to achieve new levels of effectiveness in joint warfighting. To increase efficiency and effectiveness in an environment of declining resources and a demanding operating tempo, the services and unified commands have decided to move forward together to develop new operational capabilities that will enable us to dominate any adversary along the spectrum of military operations. Goldwater-Nichols helped us to accomplish that task today, and we must carry its spirit into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

JOHN M. SHALIKASHVILI  
Chairman  
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff