

Joint Force Safety Protection and Provision

Joint force safety is as decisive as firepower, tactics, and leadership in combat performance. When safety is viewed as a resource—both an asset and an essential component of force protection—the outcome has far-reaching benefits for all warfighters. *Joint force safety* is defined as a fully integrated and functioning safety program, and when it is recognized as a vital military capability, commanders can exercise it at decisive times and places. Indeed, the desired outcome of joint safety is to develop a warfighter mindset of *asset preservation* as a means to *mission capability*.

Approximately half of all Department of Defense (DOD) mishaps since fiscal year 2002 have occurred in a joint or multi-Service arena. In Iraq and Afghanistan, there have been a number of accidents that are common to all the Services. For example, helicopter “brownouts” occur when a pilot loses visibility from sand kicking up in the desert landing area outside the aircraft. Training, tactics/techniques/procedures, and potential materiel solutions, such as dust palliatives or cockpit devices that enhance pilot situational awareness, are solutions to this problem.

Negligent discharge mishaps are another serious problem that joint force safety can help solve. Doctrine change could outline appropriate procedures for clearing and cleaning to prevent an unintended discharge of a weapon. Proper training in weapons handling would be based on the appropriate conditions and trained to stan-

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dards, and the standards would be reinforced by leadership. Innovative materiel solutions such as chamber blocks may also prevent the consequences of negligent discharge.

Of course, the Services can pursue efforts to mitigate brownouts and negligent discharge individually; however, it is more effective to leverage this knowledge by way of a joint safety effort. Moreover, while there are many joint doctrinal references on protecting the force from external threats, rarely is information on *internal* threats found in joint publications. Consequently, Services rely on their own safety centers for information, doctrine, and safety program architectures.

To remedy the disconnect among the separate Services, the Joint Force Staff Safety Office, when established, will collect mishap data, share information across the Services, resolve differences in safety policies and doctrine, and assess and disseminate best practices from one Service to the others.

The Armed Forces can prioritize their safety efforts to mitigate the most prevalent risks according to resources. Risk mitigation can be accomplished through the following framework:

- **Doctrine and Policy.** Doctrine and policy gaps should be reviewed to address appropriate safety standards. Handbooks and policies

on joint force safety may soon be developed as joint safety concepts mature.

- **Materiel Solutions.** Often there are materiel solutions that affect risk exposure. New technologies can be introduced to prevent mishaps. Some technologies, such as seatbelt improvements, can reduce injuries to the warfighter.

- **Operational Changes.** The method of operation can be changed or implemented to control, reduce, or eliminate risk to the force.

- **Leadership.** Safety is an inherent leadership responsibility at all levels. Leadership seeks a balance between accomplishing a mission and accepting the lowest possible risk. Whenever protecting the force takes a backseat to the mission, the unit’s safety culture is eroded and mishaps invariably occur.

- **Training.** Safety concepts and principles must be embedded in individual and collective training opportunities. Units with good safety records fight as they have been trained. Training devices such as simulators can often enhance safety awareness and modify high-risk behavior.

Today, joint force safety requires coordination among two or more Services or joint force components, and each offers unique and viable capabilities, perspectives, and data to the risk management and joint force preservation process. Joint safety—as an integral part of joint warfighting—ensures that the Armed Forces are prepared for any challenge. **JFQ**

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