

Summary

With the Cold War now history the Armed Forces could face the kind of stagnation major corporations have suffered in an uncompetitive marketplace. Although redundant roles and missions, and the interservice rivalry they encourage, may seem wasteful to taxpayers and Congress in search of their peace dividend, competition among the services has often improved our military capabilities. When the Army and the Navy had a similar strategic mission, the Army built a long-range fighter for continental air defense while the Navy developed carrier air. When the Army and the Marine Corps had analogous infantry roles, the Marines perfected amphibious warfare. The defense establishment should not turn a blind eye to the warp in which creative competition among the services can encourage the development of new capabilities in even a period of fiscal constraint. Consideration should also be given to creating a few competing, theater-oriented commands which may offer a variety of joint capabilities to choose from in the future.

SERVICE REDUNDANCY: WASTE OR HIDDEN CAPABILITY?

By STEPHEN PETER ROSEN

Efforts underway to restructure the Armed Forces should provide for healthy competition among the services to stimulate technological innovation in an era when the Nation no longer faces a foreign threat that is its military equal. Interservice rivalry is frequently thought of as costly and wasteful, as an irrational duplication of functions resulting from the services attempting to protect or expand bureaucratic turf at the expense of efficiency. Yet interservice competition has its creative aspects. Every organization tends to stagnate when it becomes the only game in town or when competition is rigged, from the big three auto makers to IBM and the Postal Service. Without competitive pressure, the need to respond quickly to changing circumstances or opportunities is reduced.

Properly structured service competition does not waste money and actually promotes higher levels of efficiency and innovation.

Creative competition can exist if a common strategic mission is clearly established, common criteria for success are identified and understood, and no one service is allowed to rig the game by establishing a little empire within which it is autonomous and invulnerable and thus able to achieve parochial goals (otherwise known as service log-rolling).

"The Last Thing Needed Is Interservice Rivalry"

As the defense budget declined absolutely in response to decreases in major threats to the territory of the United States, the first, least divisive, and most obvious response was to reduce the services in a roughly proportional manner. Balancing the force structure with lower end strengths provided the Nation with the full range of capabilities that had contained the global Soviet threat and regional military aggression. This

process of proportional downsizing yielded the base force.

At the same time, Congress mandated the creation of a joint culture in place of individual service cultures by emphasizing a more centralized Joint Staff, training, acquisition, and so forth. Pressures to reduce defense spending below the levels that can sustain the base force have already produced recommendations to eliminate overlapping functions and redundancies to find the money to keep the base force intact. The genuine need to promote jointness and to cope with declining budgets may combine to produce a military where there is one, and only one, capability for each identifiable function: intelligence, tactical aviation, ground combat, power projection, and so on.

As the Congress daily hammers on the services to economize and rationalize, it will become easy to lose sight of the fact that redundancy—which has a decidedly negative ring in the ears of most Americans—can also be thought of as competition, which strikes a far more positive note.

An analogy from the business world may be useful. A company that faces hard times can argue there is production overcapacity or redundancy in its sector and try to solve the problem by eliminating the overcapacity: getting rid of its competitors by tariff protection, quotas, or mergers. Unfortunately, once companies have a market sector to themselves, they often revert to slothful ways. Companies that respond to hard times by squarely facing up to their competition do much better, provided they can survive in the short run.

“What’s True for Business Isn’t True for the Military”

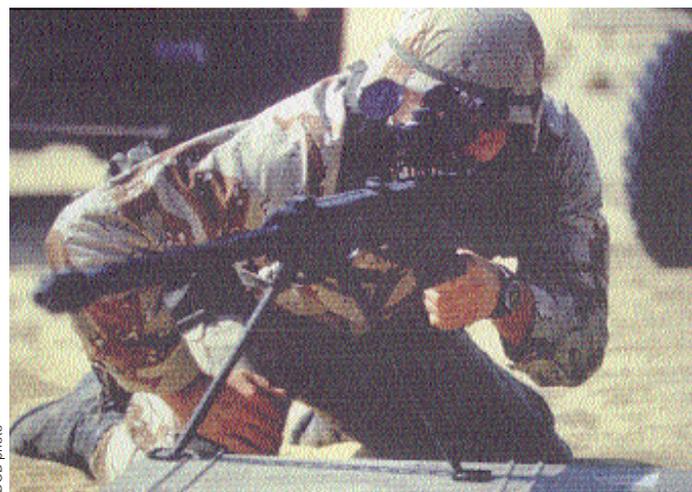
In the marketplace, where many firms do the same thing, we can buy from the supplier we like best and let the weaker ones go broke. The Nation, however, cannot afford multiple defense establishments, and we certainly do not want to see the military equivalent of going broke—that is, losing a war. Besides, the services must work together in wartime, not compete. The Japanese navy

and air force each had more than fifty kinds of radios and

several types of fighter aircraft in World War II, and both forces suffered from squandered resources and inability to communicate among the services. Which leads us to ask: what point is there in service competition anyway?

A brief look at American military history shows that interservice rivalry spurred innovation in several important cases by forcing a service to do something better or faster, or by leading to the creation of a critical military capability.

In the 1920s many members of Congress wanted to take aviation away from the Army and Navy and put all aircraft into a single air arm. Why should two services



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compete in developing fighters and bombers? The main mission facing the Armed Forces at that time was protecting the continental United States from attack. Why not give the job to one service and avoid waste? This did not occur for various reasons, and as a result each service was spurred to improve its aviation branch, fully aware that the other service was eager to take over aviation for continental defense. Both the Army and Navy had the same strategic mission, but they developed alternative ways of pursuing it. The Army developed the P-38 long-range fighter for continental air defense and B-17 bomber to attack enemy invasion fleets and foreign air bases within range of the United States. The Navy developed carrier aviation to defend against threats to the United States and the Panama Canal. Each of these redundant air forces had its characteristics, and each was extremely useful in

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World War II. If aviation had been rationalized in the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, one or the other of these essential ingredients for victory would have been lost.

Marines were employed as regular infantry during World War I in exactly the same ways as Army infantrymen. In the 1920s the Marine Corps had such unglamorous, strategically peripheral jobs as providing military guards

and fighting rebels overseas. This redundant force, however, identified a capability that was needed but that the Army made little effort to develop: amphibious assault. By 1936 the Marine Corps had developed a “Tentative Manual for Amphibious Warfare” that was not only the basis for operations in the Pacific during World War II, but also became the Army manual for amphibious landings in Europe. Had the Marines been absorbed into the Army, the invention of amphibious assault would not have come about until World War II broke out—inevitably at considerable strategic and human cost.

Immediately after World War II, the chief scientist in charge of the development of military technology, Vannevar Bush, reviewed all guided missile programs then underway. He discovered what he thought was incredible waste and redundancy of programs and tried to cut them back. He was unsuccessful. Ten years later, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Development attempted to do the same thing by placing all missile programs under the Air Force. Again, it was not done. Every history of the development of intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) notes the extremely rapid and successful development of those systems was related to the existence of competition. The Air Force knew that if it failed in the Atlas or Minuteman programs, the Army would happily take the money for its IRBM programs. The Navy knew that if it did not do its best with the Polaris program, it would lose any role in the primary strategic mission of that generation to the Air

Force. Partly as a result of this competition, the first generation of strategic ballistic missiles was fielded in a fraction of the time that it now takes for the introduction of radically new military technology.

“Now Everything Is More Expensive and Complex”

Is the notion of creative competition valid in today’s economic climate? Weapons systems have increased in cost and complexity faster than the U.S. GNP, and we buy and use fewer arms than fifty or sixty years ago. Redundancy of systems and capabilities is therefore more expensive. Yet it is also helpful to recall that we afforded redundant Air Forces and a redundant Marine Corps during the 1930s when defense spending as a whole was, at most, 1.5 percent of GNP, or only half the figure of even the more Draconian five-year projections today. If the utility of creative competition is understood, we may well opt for it within the fiscal constraints that are emerging. In addition, the idea of redundant force structures is consistent with the prototypical research and development strategy advocated by the Department of Defense in the past as well as by the new Secretary of Defense. The point is that today the United States needs fewer forces in being and a wider menu of potential military capabilities from which to choose, precisely because we do not know what the threat will be or how it will fight.

“How Do You Get Creative Competition?”

An examination of the historical examples of good and bad interservice rivalry reveals that Japan’s experience was bad because the army’s strategic mission before Pearl Harbor—defeating China and the Soviet Union—was entirely different from that of the navy—defeating the British and American fleets. Not until June 1941 did the army and navy agree that the United States was the principal enemy. It was a wonder they could work together at all. In the case of

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Lockheed photo by Schulzinger and Lombard

Technological innovation: the F-117 cockpit features a video monitor with infrared imagery from onboard sensors, full color moving-maps, and a 4-D flight control system.

competition in the U.S. military over aviation capabilities, there was at least some agreement about the main task; so that while there was competition, it was not about what to do but rather how to do it.

This agreement on a strategic mission was even clearer in the 1950s when the objective was understood by all to be putting megatons on Soviet targets. Agreement on the strategic mission is essential because it ensures that all the services will work in the same direction, and that each will develop a capability that should help achieve what the Nation needs in wartime. It also makes it dif-

upon: for example, projecting a strategically significant amount of power from the continental United States to the periphery of Asia. Instead of the present arrangement of theater-oriented commands, two or three “Strategic Expeditionary Corps” or SECs could be created. Each would be a joint command and have one-half or one-third of the Army and Marine Corps divisions and Air Force wings that Congress decides to fund, a joint training center, and its own operations and maintenance budget. Each SEC would be told how much strategic airlift and sealift it could call upon and given the same planning scenarios. Each would then be told to come up with the concept of operations it thought best, to be measured along dimensions identified by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Each could identify preferred research and development and procurement priorities for the short- and

long-term. The Chairman could then judge the concept of operations, war plans, training activities, and exercises developed by each SEC and see what different technological opportunities they identified for funding.

This differs from the current system of unified commands where each command is the only supplier of military services in its functional or regional domain. Not only do commands not face competition, they are restricted to their own turf until such time, for instance, that Atlantic forces are needed in the Pacific, or the other way around. SECs, in contrast, would not only compete among themselves but they would be geographically fungible.

The notional approach of Strategic Expeditionary Corps satisfies the need for competition while also pursuing jointness at force levels below that envisaged in the base force. There are certainly better ways to accomplish this same goal, and professional officers will be more apt to come up with them than an academic. But we should never lose sight of the fact that a little competition never hurt anyone. After all, it was the principle that won the Cold War. **JFQ**

Army and Marine Corps patrols in Humvees with roof-mounted M-60s.



DOD photos

ficult for a service to identify its own military niche and say, “What the other services do is fine but it isn’t relevant to us—let them do what they want, but let us do what we want.” Agreement on mission makes it possible for both the Commander in Chief or the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to supervise by saying to the services in effect, “You are each trying to do X, and one of you seems to be doing it much better—show me why I am wrong.”

Establishing criteria for success in accomplishing a mission enables the Joint Staff to track service progress on a routine basis. Creative competition among the services in peacetime can’t be tracked the way it would be in war, by seeing who wins the battles most easily. Competition in peacetime must be structured and appropriate standards set for the services to meet. And competition cannot be completely opened, exist for its own sake, and be funded indefinitely. Establishing hard, quantitative bottom lines is an extremely useful way for keeping competition honest and focused.

“Can We Foster Creative Competition Today?”

One notional idea is to identify a strategic mission that each of the services agrees