

Goldwater-Nichols Act

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The **Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986** Pub.L. 99-433 reworked the command structure of the United States military. It increased the powers of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

It made the most sweeping changes to the United States Department of Defense since the department was established in the National Security Act of 1947.

Named after Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) and Representative William Flynt "Bill" Nichols (D-Alabama), the bill passed the House of Representatives, 383-27, and the Senate, 95-0. It was signed into law by President Reagan on October 1, 1986.

Among other changes, Goldwater-Nichols streamlined the military chain of command, which now runs from the President through the Secretary of Defense directly to unified combat commanders, bypassing the service chiefs who were assigned an advisory role.

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History

The Goldwater-Nichols Act was an attempt to fix problems caused by inter-service rivalry, which had emerged during the Vietnam War, contributed to the catastrophic failure of the Iranian hostage rescue mission in 1980, and which was still evident in the invasion of Grenada in 1983 [1] [2].

Such problems existed as well in World War II, during which two independent lines of command flowed from the President, one through the Secretary of the Navy to naval forces, and the other through the Secretary of War to land and air forces. In 1947, the military restructuring placed all military forces, including the newly independent Air Force, under a single civilian Secretary of Defense.

However, the United States military was still organized along lines of command that reported to their respective service chiefs (Commandant of the Marine Corps, Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Air Force, and Chief of Naval Operations). These chiefs in turn made up the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Chiefs of Staff elected a Chairman to communicate with the civilian government. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in turn reported to the Secretary of Defense, the civilian head of the military. Both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense reported to the President of the United States, who holds the position of commander-in-chief of all U.S. armed forces.

This system led to counter-productive inter-service rivalry. Peacetime activities (such as procurement and creation of doctrine, etc.) were tailored for each service in isolation. Just as seriously, wartime activities of each service were planned, executed, and evaluated independently. These practices resulted in division of effort, the inability to profit from economies of scale, and inhibited the development of modern warfare doctrine.

The formulation of the AirLand Battle doctrine in the late 1970s and early 1980s laid bare the difficulty of coordinating efforts among various service branches. AirLand Battle attempted to synthesize all of the capabilities of the service arms of the military into a single doctrine. The system envisioned ground, naval, air, and space based systems acting in concert to attack and defeat an opponent in depth. The structure of the armed forces effectively blocked realization of this ideal. The US invasion of Grenada in 1983 further exposed the problems with the military command structure. Although the United States forces easily prevailed, its leaders expressed major concerns over both the inability of the different service branches to coordinate and communicate with each other, and the consequences of a lack of coordination if faced with a more threatening foe.

Effects

Under the Goldwater-Nichols Act, military advice was centralized in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as opposed to the service chiefs. The Chairman was designated as the principal military advisor to the President of the United States, National Security Council and Secretary of Defense. The act also established the position of Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and simplified the chain of command. It increased the ability of the Chairman to direct overall strategy, but provided greater command authority to "unified" and "specified" field commanders. The Chairman *may not exercise military command over the Joint Chiefs of Staff or any of the armed forces.* (section 152c of the Act)

Goldwater-Nichols changed the way the services interact. The services themselves "organize, train and equip" forces for use by the combatant commanders (CCDRs), and the service chiefs no longer exercise any operational control over their forces. Rather than reporting to a service chief operationally, the service component forces support the CCDR responsible for a specific function (Transportation, Space, Special Operations), or a geographic region of the globe (Europe, Middle East, etc.). The CCDR then fielded a force capable of employing AirLand Battle doctrine (or its successors) using all assets available to the military. The restructuring afforded a combination of effort, integrated planning, shared procurement, and a reduction or elimination in inter-service rivalry between commanders. It also provided unity of command, comporting with Military Science. Individual services changed from war fighting entities into organizational and training units, responsible for readiness. Thus CENTCOM (Central Command) for example, would be assigned air, ground, and naval assets in order to achieve its objective, not the inefficient method of individual services planning, supporting, and fighting the same war.

Shared procurement allowed the various branches to share technological advances such as stealth and smart weapons quickly and provided other ancillary benefits (such as the interoperability of radios between services, heretofore unknown in the military). Joint implementation of new technology allowed for joint development of supporting doctrine. Therefore, the Goldwater-Nichols Act could be seen as the initial step of the currently ongoing Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) with its concept of Network Centric Warfare (NCW). Without the restructuring, i.e. integration of the three branches and improvement of underlying processes, NCW would not be thinkable. Conceptually it was tailored to Cold-War symmetric threats.

The first successful test of Goldwater-Nichols was the 1991 Gulf War ("Operation Desert Storm"), where it functioned exactly as planned, allowing the U.S. commander, Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, to exercise full control over Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Navy assets without having to negotiate with the individual services.

Changes since 1986

On October 29, 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered that the functional and regional commanders be referred to not as "CINCs" but as "combatant commanders" when applied to "unified" regional organizations (e.g., USCENTCOM), or "commander" when talking about "specified" units such as the U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). Rumsfeld said the term "CINC" was inappropriate, because under the U.S.

Constitution, the President is the military's only commander-in-chief. His decision was intended to clarify the military's subordination to civilian government.

Bibliography

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External links

- Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986

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