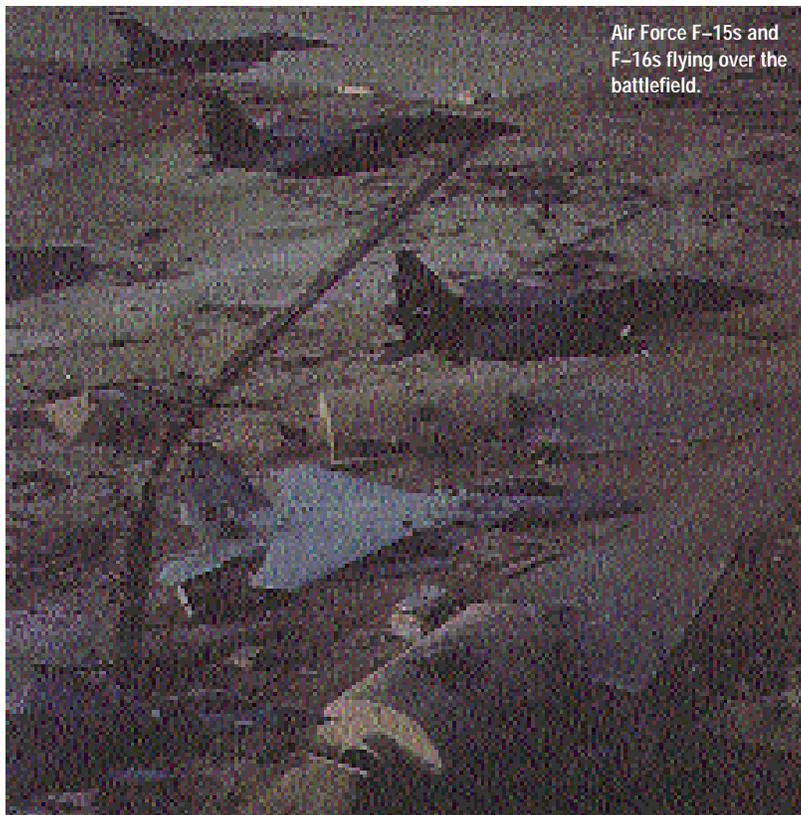


Jointness, Service Culture, and the Gulf War

By BERNARD E. TRAINOR



Air Force F-15s and F-16s flying over the battlefield.

The victory in the Gulf War is viewed as a vindication of those who called for military reform in the wake of the disastrous 1980 Iranian hostage rescue mission and the flawed invasion of Grenada a few years later. Those clumsy operations were attributed to the failure of the services to work together. Reformers charged that the services had exchanged officers and sent students to each other's schools for years, but that it was not enough to transcend service culture. When it came to operations, land, sea, and air forces tended to operate autonomously, ignoring colleagues in differently colored uniforms. Critics cited numerous cases of counterproductive parochialism. A service would develop weapons and equipment without regard to their compatibility with that of the other services.

Army and Navy communications systems couldn't talk to one another, heavy equipment was acquired that could not be loaded into cargo planes, and each service had its own doctrine for employing air assets, to cite a few impediments to smooth interservice cooperation.

There was no intent to erase the differences in service philosophies and cultures, but it was hoped that the unique characteristics and strengths of each service could be molded to complement one another so the whole would be greater than the sum of its parts. Jointness became the mantra of the Armed Forces after passage of the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986.

Curiously enough, the first military operation in the wake of that act was anything but joint. Operation Just Cause, the surprise attack on Manuel Noriega's regime in Panama in 1988, was an Army-run show from start to finish. It was planned by the Army, with the other services having little knowledge of it and less input. The Navy played virtually no role. The Air Force provided only transport and a few misdirected bombs delivered by stealth bombers. Marines

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This essay is drawn from a forthcoming book entitled *The Generals' War* which will be published by Little, Brown next summer.



U.S. Air Force

Abrams tanks of the 24th Infantry Division in the Saudi desert.

in Panama at the time were given busy work on the periphery of the operation.

The first real test of jointness came in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. It showed, as reformers maintain, that much had been accomplished in fulfilling the goals of Goldwater-Nichols. The most demonstrable example was seen in the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell. As a result of Goldwater-Nichols, he wielded power and influence beyond that exercised by previous Chairmen. He was the politico-military maestro of the Gulf War. His fellow members on the Joint Chiefs were relegated to onlookers who simply provided the forces. While Powell kept them informed, he made clear the intent of the 1986 legislation. He in no way needed their concurrence for his decisions.

Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, unschooled in military affairs, knew that such singular power in the hands of one officer could make the Nation's civilian leadership hostage to Powell's advice. Cheney adroitly and informally bypassed Powell for additional military opinions to assure himself of

differing views. In this way he restored the checks and balances that disappeared when Goldwater-Nichols removed other JCS members from corporate decisionmaking (in their advisory capacity). This technique did not sit well with Powell and, although he never challenged Cheney's right to solicit advice from others, it angered him.

Goldwater-Nichols also increased the authority of theater commanders and freed them from service parochialism. Like the Chairman, the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Central Command (CINCCENT), General Norman Schwarzkopf, understood both the letter and intent of the law and wielded it effectively. As the result of the act, he was king in the Kuwaiti theater of operations. All within his domain had to do his bidding. During the war, no serious attempt was made by any service to go around Schwarzkopf. (A service chief couldn't visit the theater without the express permission of the CINC, and then only to interface with personnel of his own service.) Goldwater-Nichols had drawn clean and efficient lines of authority. Service component commanders under Schwarzkopf communicated only with him and he only communicated with Powell.

But the Gulf War shows that there is still a lot to be done if the Armed Forces are to operate in a truly joint manner. The structure for joint operations put in place by the act had not yet taken root. It was a template that did not fully accommodate the cultural differences among the services. For example, a Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) was created with interservice agreement to govern the air war over both Kuwait and Iraq. But JFACC was in the hands of the Air Force and reflected that service's cultural biases. It believed in centralized control of air power and attacks against only the targets planners believed critical to the overall campaign. These views did not necessarily comport with those of other services. The Army, with only attack helicopters for air support, complained that its sister service was ignoring its needs. The Marine Corps, also unhappy with Air Force control of the air war, but with its own air arm, simply subverted the Air Force-dominated joint system.

There are no actual villains in this scenario: each service sought to accomplish the mission but was looking at the situation through a lens colored by its own concept of

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U.S. Navy (William A. Lipski)

Task Force 155—
USS Saratoga,
USS America, and
USS John F. Kennedy—
in the Red Sea.

warfighting. The Air Force believed it was *shaping the battlefield* for the Army by hitting Iraqi targets within kill boxes it drew on battlefield maps. But the Army had specific targets its commanders wanted hit and, when the Air Force removed targets from the list for reasons it viewed as sensible, the Army complained bitterly. In turn, the Air Force was frustrated in the last days of the conflict when the Army's VII Corps placed the fire support coordination line so far forward that aircraft could not freely attack Iraqi forces fleeing toward Basra.

Even the Navy and Marines, conscious of their status as integrated components of the naval service, had differences. The Navy had little interest in amphibious operations, the centerpiece of the Marine *raison d'être*. The Navy was carrier-oriented and saw itself in competition with the Air Force for laurels in the air war. It was having a hard enough time trying to deal with Air Force tasking orders for air strikes to entertain hare-brained notions from the Marines. The very idea of an amphibious assault in Kuwait did not conform to the Navy's view of warfare. The Marines had to dispatch a special team of amphibious planners from the United States to get the Navy to even understand the possible virtues of an attack from the sea against the Iraqis.

From the very outset of the Gulf crisis, Schwarzkopf himself violated the spirit of jointness as enshrined by Goldwater-Nichols. He imported a special team of Army planners

to draw up his ground offensive strategy. They then invited a British planner to join their supersecret inner circle, but excluded a Marine representative. Yet the Marines, with almost all their combat forces committed to the campaign, had greater call on formulating strategy than the British. It was not a deliberate slight; it was an unconscious reflection of service culture. For decades the Army had institutionally focused on Europe. It had much more in common with a long-standing NATO ally than it did with a service with which it rarely associated.

Even in the Army there were cultural differences which influenced performance. Heavy in armor brought from Germany, VII Corps was organized, trained, and equipped to fight the Soviet army. Not surprisingly it planned to fight in the Gulf as though it faced the Soviets. Meticulous planning and deliberate synchronization of forces are hallmarks of NATO procedures. The British 1st Armored Division, also from NATO Europe, fit into the VII Corps scheme of things far more easily than fellow Americans from XVIII Airborne Corps. Based in the United States as a central reserve, XVIII Corps was not NATO-oriented and was ready to go anywhere in the world against any enemy. In that respect there was greater kinship among its divisions and the Marines than with VII Corps. Culturally, battle procedures in the 82^d Airborne, 24th Mechanized, and 101st Air Assault Divisions were different and less formal than those in NATO units.

Paradoxically, Schwarzkopf recognized that jointness didn't mean his subordinates would all think or act alike. This was one reason he adopted a decentralized command policy which gave maximum freedom of action within the framework of the overall plan. But having done so, neither he nor his staff fully thought through the implications of executing the plan. Had they done so, they could have better anticipated how the battle would unfold and been positioned to capitalize on it. As it was the battle got away from the CINC at the outset and he never regained control.

The rapid Marine advance on the first day of the war knocked the VII Corps timetable into a cocked hat. CENTCOM planners counted on the Marines holding the enemy in place in southern Iraq so that VII Corps could launch its planned seven-to

ten-day offensive on the following day to envelop the Iraqis further north. But the Iraqis were in retreat. It should not have been a surprise that the Marines were not going to dally at the Kuwaiti border. Their plan, which was known to CENTCOM, and the cultural commitment which the Marines have to offensive operations, should have made it clear that they would advance aggressively. The only thing Schwarzkopf could do to get things on track was to speed up the VII Corps attack. But VII Corps was trained to advance in a deliberate, synchronized fashion. This was part of its culture, so well suited to a war in Europe. To Schwarzkopf's frustration they didn't move fast enough. But once again he should not have been surprised since he knew the corps commander and his style of operations. Schwarzkopf's decentralized style of leadership undid his carefully crafted strategy.

Besides endorsing decentralized operational planning and execution, the CINC also elected not to name an overall commander of both Army and Marine ground forces, which was legitimate given the wide separation between service components. But had he done so, more control might have been exercised over the offensive from the outset. At very least the land force commander would have seen that the planned rates of advance between the Marine supporting attack and the VII Corps main attack were unbalanced. It was expecting too much of jointness to assume that the Marine Expeditionary Force on the southern border of Kuwait would think much about its Army counterpart in the western desert. The same may be said of VII Corps in that desert. It cared little about what the Marines were up to. The force commanders planned to fight the war according to their own style. Goldwater-Nichols may not have intended that they fight the same way, but it did anticipate that a joint command would be knowledgeable of the differences and harmonize them.

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What conclusions can be drawn from the Gulf War, the first major enterprise in jointness? At the highest level the goals of the DOD Reorganization Act were largely achieved. Throughout the war there were clean lines of authority, direction, and responsibility. But at field level jointness still has a way to go. Doctrinal differences between the services still exist. As in the past they are frequently papered over with ambiguous language in joint agreements, leaving commanders in the field to interpret differences on a case-by-case basis. Secondly, the degree of jointness is directly proportional to the degree of dependence implicit in any given set of circumstances. The service that depends most on support from a sister service will champion jointness. The Army is the prime example of dependency. Services capable of semi-autonomous action are inclined to go their own way if circumstances allow. The Navy and Air Force fall into this category.

Finally, joint culture has not yet matured sufficiently to take into account and accommodate the cultural differences among the services. And herein lies a danger as we proceed along the path towards greater jointness. If for its sake conformity is achieved at the expense of uniqueness, we could end up with a military that is inflexible, uncreative, and most importantly, predictable. Both for present and future planners the task is to recognize the unquantifiable value that service culture plays in warfighting. It is a characteristic to be exploited, not suppressed. **JFQ**