

Amphibious assault  
vehicle, RIMPAC '00.



out of joint

U.S. Navy (Michael D. Smotherman)

# The Paradox of Joint Culture

By DAVID T. FAUTUA

**S**ince the passage of the Goldwater Nichols Act in 1986, critics have raised the dangers of forming too close a bond among the services. Their fear is that doing so will subvert institutional traditions and culture, thereby stifling important but diverse perspectives. The friction of ideas was considered to be natural and necessary for joint warfighting. Being too joint, the argument goes, will breed collusion. Yet while some operators and theorists have outlined the pitfalls of restricting service-specific legacies, they have charged that not

doing so impedes true jointness. The absence of joint culture, moreover, has also meant that purple-minded members of the Armed Forces have found an absence of shared values in which to ground strategic thinking apart from priorities set by the services. Joint nonculture has triumphed. Indeed, articles published under the rubric of Out of Joint in *JFQ* have been largely devoted to the topic; thus a rereading of these contributions may explain the cognitive dissonance surrounding joint culture in the minds of joint warfighters.

## Making the Journey

The inaugural issue of the journal was published in Summer 1993 and introduced readers to Out of Joint with an article that laid the foundation for the “undesirability of absolute jointness.”

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# Report Documentation Page

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Contributed by Seth Cropsey, "The Limits of Jointness" contended among other things that "True jointness demands seamlessly linked operations between different military capabilities." But that fortuitous marriage would only occur if the services could "quarrel" over the meaning of jointness based on "ideas rooted in experience." In other words, open competition among the services over their unique perspectives on warfighting was seen as a precondition of jointness. Cropsey worried that Goldwater-Nichols defined "jointness as a diminution of the power of the individual services" and that Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, imposed "political correctness" by stating that "there is no room for rivalry on the joint team."

By not allowing the services to "squabble," ideas essential to jointness would be muffled, "such as the unequal division of budget cuts based on national requirements or national security strategy that may not rely on balanced forces." The way to find a common perspective, according to Cropsey, is not to exhort the military to get one, but to "provide one that is based on the ideas rooted in experience."

Michael Vlahos pursued the same argument in "By Our Orthodoxies Shall Ye Know Us" (Autumn 93). Like Cropsey, he praised the practical application of jointness, but was troubled that the term would become a rhetorical "grail," thereby causing tunnel vision in strategic thinkers. Jointness also appeared to him as counterintuitive, even sinister, given service parochialism during peacetime. Vlahos suspected that the concept is really a peacetime survival tactic used to stave off budget cuts. Under the politically unassailable cover of jointness, the services found a way to not only mask service-centric pursuits but to sanction them. In this light, jointness spelled disaster, which Vlahos warned would "not focus our minds on the next challenger or the next war."

What is striking about both Cropsey and Vlahos is that despite acknowledging how service cultures have been obstacles to jointness, they prescribe reliance on service traditions to achieve it. "Ideas rooted in experience" are precisely what define and confirm service distinctiveness.

It is difficult to imagine that legislation can muffle service-centric culture. Beyond service trumpeting, the authors leave an unveiled impression that their knights could win wars seemingly on their own, affirming that "we breed cranky individualism because we believe, when all is said and done, that warfare is about LeMay being superior to Krushchev, or Horner being superior to Saddam." Moreover, if deceit and pursuit of self-interest lurk in the nature of jointness as Cropsey thinks, it appears counterintuitive to conclude that protecting service traditions will somehow curb deceit and the pursuit of narrow-minded interests.

### Jointness as Synergy

It took a third contribution by Bernard Trainor, "Jointness, Service Culture, and the Gulf War" (Winter 93-94), to finally suggest that joint culture was a crucial but as yet incomplete building block in elevating service thinking to the level of joint warfare. Without joint culture, the services would present their requirements "without regard to their compatibility with that of other services." Nor would service culture accommodate "a joint way of thinking" under a joint

### Out of Joint: A Universal List (1993-1999)

Seth Cropsey, "The Limits of Jointness," issue 1 (Summer 93), pp. 72-79; Michael Vlahos, "By Our Orthodoxies Shall Ye Know Us," issue 2 (Autumn 93), pp. 108-10; Bernard E. Trainor, "Jointness, Service Culture, and the Gulf War," issue 3 (Winter 93-94), pp. 71-74; Carl H. Builder, "Roles and Missions: Back to the Future," issue 4 (Spring 94), pp. 32-37; J.L. Whitlow, "JFACC: Who's in Charge?" issue 5 (Summer 94), pp. 64-70; The State of Civil-Military Relations: Two Views—A.J. Bacevich, "Civilian Control: A Useful Fiction?" pp. 76-79, and Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Civilian Control: A National Crisis?" issue 6 (Autumn/Winter 94-95), pp. 80-83; Robert B. Kupiszewski, "Joint Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," issue 7 (Spring 95), pp. 72-76; Michael C. Vitale, "Jointness by Design, Not Accident," issue 9 (Autumn 95), pp. 24-30; William W. Mendel, "New Forces for Engagement Policy," issue 10 (Winter 95-96); David Yost, "Where Are the Arleigh Burkes Today?" issue 11 (Spring 96), pp. 125-27; Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr., and Thomas-Durell Young, "Joint Doctrine Development: Overcoming a Legacy," issue 14 (Winter 96-97), pp. 94-99; Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Interservice Competition: The Solution, Not the Problem," issue 15 (Spring 97), pp. 50-53; Lawrence B. Wilkerson, "What Exactly Is Jointness?" issue 16 (Summer 97), pp. 66-68; Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., "Joint Vision 2010: A Red Team Assessment," issue 17 (Autumn/Winter 97-98), pp. 47-49; C.P. Ankersen, "A Little Bit Joint—Component Commands: Seams, Not Synergy," issue 18 (Spring 98), pp. 116-21; Vincent M. Dreyer, Bruce C. Emig, and James T. Sanny, Jr., "The Joint Evaluation Report—Career Enhancer or Kiss of Death," issue 20 (Autumn/Winter 98-99), pp. 65-70; William A. Owens, "Making the Joint Journey," issue 21 (Spring 99), pp. 92-95; Peter F. Herrly, "The Plight of Joint Doctrine after Kosovo," issue 22 (Summer 99), pp. 99-104; Susan E. Merdinger, "Recipe for Failure: Centralization and U.S. Joint Forces Command," issue 23 (Autumn/Winter 99-00); Barry M. Blechman, Kevin P. O'Prey, and Renee Lajoire, "Grading Theater Engagement Planning," issue 24 (Spring 00), pp. 98-103; and Damian J. McCarthy and Susan A. Medlin, "Two Hats for the Joint Force Commander?" issue 25 (Summer 00), pp. 91-98.

JFQ

Aboard *USS Vincennes*  
in Yokosuka Harbor.



out of joint

U.S. Navy (Dennis Centrell)

command. For an exasperated contributor, J.L. Whitlow in “JFACC: Who’s in Charge?” (Summer 94), the advent of the joint force air component commander was a thoroughly “unjunct” event. Problems of target prioritization and of command and control systems used in managing joint air operations was that they were “generally not joint, but Air Force.”

A jarring assessment of how little things had changed almost five years later was offered in “Making the Joint Journey” (Spring 99) by a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Owens. He found “service

parochialism is still the most important factor in force planning.” Over a decade after Goldwater-Nichols was enacted, military operations remained more joint in name than

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practice and the joint requirements process was observed more in rhetoric than execution. *Crystalline stovepipes* is the term applied by Owens to service approaches to jointness, something that he detected even in supposed joint commands. CINCs generally exercise command through assigned service components. Thus when the Joint Staff requests input on force structure, CINCs “usually compile the separate recommendations

furnished by service components . . . which are often drafted back in Washington by service staffs.” This practice was also the subject of another contribution entitled “A Little Bit Joint—Component Commands: Seams, Not Synergy” (Spring 98) by C.P. Ankersen that identified it as a structural impediment to jointness. Component command headquarters act like the tentacles of the services rather than purple-minded staffs of joint warfighters working cooperatively under the joint commander.

Owens recommended radical change, arguing for consolidating military requirements under a joint requirements committee, a senior decision-making body chaired by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense and with the Chairman (or his designated representative) as principal military advisor. Only service chiefs (or vice chiefs) would be included, along with four senior civilians from the Office of the Secretary of Defense. “We should strip out all other requirements bodies,” Owens advised, “and consolidate analytic resources in the new requirements committee staff.” The process of determining requirements would be removed from the services, which would implement decisions of the committee. To “strip away” parochialism from

Exercise at Joint  
Readiness Training  
Center.



U.S. Army (Raymond A. Barnard)

the battlefield, Owens proposed combining the “great enablers of combat power” (that is, intelligence, communications, logistics, and medical care) with the services acting as executive agents for these critical support functions.

These dramatic proposals were a refutation of the notion that protecting service cultures and traditions would eventually lead to jointness. If anything, the joint journey had proven the need for limiting service cultures as a means of curbing parochialism. As Owens saw it, the problem had to be corrected at the source, at service academies and in officer training programs where the objective was not simply to commission good officers but rather “good Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force officers.” By urging that the early education of officers inculcate joint culture, Owens raised more worrisome concerns. One could not help questioning the much heralded efficacy of the joint education or the value of joint doctrine itself.

A number of practitioners and theorists also warned of danger in an emerging joint culture. Lawrence Wilkerson, for instance, cautioned in “What Exactly Is Jointness?” (Summer 97) that true jointness is “not created by doctrine, joint or otherwise” nor “imparted by fiat” nor even to be regarded as “seamless.” From seminar discussions and comments by students, he concluded that true jointness is nothing more than the trust and understanding that soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen have in their comrades as, above all,

experts in their service core competencies. “That is the only foundation on which true jointness can be built.”

### No Safe Haven

Turning to education, Wilkerson fretted over “knee-jerk change” initiated by the Joint Staff, like the attempt to introduce learning objectives for force protection and risk management. These objectives were promulgated without much forethought to existing service priorities and appeared to be “rooted in political expediency,” which he found influences action by the Joint Staff. “That is why the increasing power of the Joint Staff is so troublesome,” he continued, “not now or over the next year but for the future.” Though Wilkerson stated that the increasing power of the Joint Staff did not yet fully “impinge” on the flourishing of service cultures or “healthy competitiveness,” he predicted that given its current direction it certainly will in time.

This was the same risk that Harvey Sapolsky had identified in “Interservice Competitor: The Solution, Not the Problem” (Spring 97). Without interservice competition, the services would “prefer to collude” and, even more distressing, use jointness as a “shield against public scrutiny.” Offering a cautionary insight that seemed to anticipate a proposal by Admiral Owens to expose both cadets and midshipmen to joint culture, Sapolsky cited “separate academies, distinctive uniforms, and unique military traditions” as attributes of the services that helped maintain public support for the Armed Forces. “Luckily, the services have not

F-15s from Kadena air base, Japan.



18<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron (Marvin Krause)

entirely lost their identities, although some promoters of jointness wish they had.”

It is perhaps not surprising that joint specialty officers (JSOs) have not escaped attention in an emerging joint culture. An assessment by Vincent Dreyer, Bruce Emig, and James Sanny, “The Evaluation Report—Career Enhancer or Kiss of Death” (Autumn/Winter 98–99), surveyed students and faculty at the then Armed Forces Staff College and found some troubling differences in understanding among immediate and senior raters on standards for evaluating JSOs. Of the raters queried, only 36 percent felt positive about their comprehension of the evaluation systems of the other services. Army officers felt the most informed “though not strongly,” followed by Marine raters and lastly by raters from the Navy and Air Force. Lacking confidence in raters, usually

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from other services, an unsettling 78 percent of respondents saw a need to prepare or write portions of their evaluations for self-protection. Just as bothersome was the comparison of perceptions among officers of joint assignments before and after their tours. A total of 73 percent of the respondents who had no joint experience felt that a joint tour would impact favorably on their careers. That figure dropped to 50 percent when JSOs were

interviewed. The article concluded that the average joint specialty officer “seems less optimistic about promotion after joint duty,” a judgment that seems to render premature claims of a corps of joint officers “rarely before found in our military institutions and culture.”

Developing joint doctrine also has been hobbled by the lack of a supportive joint culture, if indeed such a thing can exist in this contentious arena. From the outset attempts to connect notions of joint culture and doctrine have been an exercise in forging links that break. This is partly due to the devotion of the services to their own strategic doctrine, which explains their violent resistance to accommodation. There are also differences in how services regard doctrine. Douglas Lovelace and Thomas-Durell Young addressed them in “Joint Doctrine Development: Overcoming a Legacy” (Winter 96–97), stating that historically “the services have not agreed on what doctrine means.”

Lovelace and Young found that while the Army accepted joint doctrine as authoritative, the primacy of the soldier led to a caveat that doctrine is subject to judgment in application. That perspective contrasts with a culture in the Navy which “focuses on technology and independent operations” and “defines doctrine as conceptual”; and with the Marine Corps which emphasizes warfighting as primary and considers doctrine “a codification of its essence rather than a body of knowledge to be consulted in preparing for and conducting war.” And those perspectives differ from that of the Air Force which “sees weaponry as

a defining feature of war” and technology as supreme; therefore that service tends toward “a subordination of doctrine and operational procedures.” Given that joint doctrine was intended to transcend individual perspectives and integrate the contributions of each service to warfighting, one can understand how the absence of a cohesive joint culture has complicated the task. Meanwhile, the endless process of building consensus among the services on draft publications leads planners to “reach for the lowest common denominator.”

### The Future of Jointness

That the idea of joint culture is a seemingly self-contradictory proposition to the ambitions of a self-professed joint military remains a puzzling paradox. Equally astonishing is how the term has survived as an expression of a possible truth even as proponents for jointness decry initiatives that might actually draw the services closer or recoil at the slightest suggestion of delimiting service cultures. Those who find this predicament as simply indicating a divided joint community unable to reconcile internal differences will overlook the profound irony that undermines the joint process. The joint community views this question as a Hobson’s choice between service and joint culture. Advocates of joint culture may be struggling in vain to convince the joint community to discover a middle way to nurture, reassure, and sustain purple-minded warfighters because the military simply believes no such course exists or should exist.

Unfortunately, operationalizing joint doctrine in combat has cast doubt on the importance of a culture of shared values and a common theory of victory. If anything, as Peter Herrly pointed out in “The Plight of Joint Doctrine After Kosovo” (Summer 99), the Air Force-only conduct of Operation Allied Force in Kosovo “was inconsistent with joint doctrine in both word and spirit.” Accepting the nature of the operation and the obsession with casualties which resulted in excluding ground forces, Herrly said that the debate “runs deeper than terminology and reveals shortcomings in military culture.” He worried that decision-makers would increasingly conclude that there would be an “orderly, discrete, and bloodless military option: the air campaign” in wars of the future. As a former chief of joint doctrine on the Joint Staff (J-7) and a key participant in the devel-

opment of Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Herrly reminded us that despite mantras on fighting wars jointly, airpower had become the policy tool of choice for combat and “has several times become further distorted to mean salvos of cruise missiles.”

Whether the debate on joint culture continues along a paradoxical path depends largely on the degree of enlightened self-interest that the services place on jointness and thus their willingness to adjust institutional norms to accommodate the cultures of the other services. The prospect is not promising, given single-mindedness in pursuing service transformation agendas which encourage fierce competition for scarce resources. There is no doubt that the services will make efforts to cast transformation as joint-friendly, notwithstanding underlying disparities. Thus claims by the Army that a digitized, lighter, information-based objective force will contribute to jointness must be weighed against claims by the Air Force that it does not have sufficient lift for those light divisions because of internal priorities that favor strategic bombing aircraft.

Improving Army strategic speed may be a moot point as the Navy deploys new land-attack destroyers and the Marine Corps fields air amphibious formations to dominate littorals, an area that was once a province of the Army. And if strategic airpower should win the day, the conventional wisdom that the man on the ground is the ultimate arbiter of war will have to be amended.

Changes in service cultures, albeit modest or logical, are difficult and must come from within the Armed Forces. Thus if the description offered by Admiral Owens on the state of jointness is accurate, no amount of externally driven reform will fundamentally alter service culture. Perhaps the most that can be expected at this time is a forthright recognition that any common perspective is jeopardized if the services continue to operate under an illusion of joint culture. Without a cohesive culture of shared values that transcends service interests and inspires purple-minded warfighters to think as a team, genuine jointness will be muted by service parochialism when convenient, whether on a battlefield or joint staff. Many will be unsurprised and even take comfort from this situation. That is the curious paradox of joint culture.

JFQ



U.S. Army (Raymond A. Barnard)

Tracking exercise, Fort Polk.