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Executive Summary

This October marks the 40th anniversary of what is easily the most important reform of the U.S. military in modern times: the Goldwater–Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, 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 by reworking the command structure of the United States military. It increased the powers of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and implemented some of the suggestions from the

Packard Commission, commissioned by President Reagan in 1985.”¹ This law set in place the concept of jointness and a truly joint force, and it “streamlined the military chain of command” from the President through the Secretary of Defense—now the Secretary of War—“directly to the combatant commanders . . . , bypassing the [S]ervice chiefs.”² The solid bipartisan support for this law was the result of several years of debate both within the Department of Defense and on Capitol Hill.

As I mentioned in *Joint Force Quarterly* (JFQ) 72 after his passing,³ former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones, U.S. Air

Force, became the champion for this change, particularly after he retired in 1982. A 1960 graduate of the National War College, which later became part of National Defense University (NDU), General Jones was hardly the obvious candidate for wanting the Services to work together operationally and leading the charge for jointness, as he would do at the end of his distinguished military career. Rising without a completed college degree, he had served as General Curtis LeMay’s chief of staff during the heyday of the Strategic Air Command. His National War College paper discussed the value of nuclear deterrence against the Soviet threat, but interestingly, about

a third of his essay focused on joint and combined warfighting.

Less than 2 years after General Jones became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in June 1978, the United States failed in its April 1980 attempt to rescue U.S. hostages from Iran. This failure prompted many critiques of how the military was performing, especially when different Service formations were working in joint operations. Jones became most vocal for the need to reform in the months leading up to the end of his term in 1982. In an article in the commercial publication *Armed Forces Journal*, he offered several reforms that were opposed by several Service Chiefs as well as many leading defense voices at the time.⁴ Jones also gave an interview to the *New York Times* that further emphasized these arguments.⁵ He would continue his efforts working the Hill after he retired. These efforts led to Goldwater-Nichols in 1986, and the law would likely not have succeeded without him.

Goldwater-Nichols changed the command structure of the U.S. military—especially relationships among the Secretary, the Service Chiefs, the combatant commands, and the Joint Staff—and the way that processes like the development of major weapons systems are carried out. Multiple joint and combined operations and combat experiences over the last 40 years have been reviewed with this law as the background. Examples of both success and failure have occurred and remain hot topics for discussion in our war college classrooms, as well as in the defense establishment by proponents and critics alike. *JFQ* has always offered a place for these ideas to appear, including those of General Jones himself.⁶

The debate on the success or failure of the Goldwater-Nichols reforms continues. In the pages of this journal alone, these reforms have been a constant source of discussion and evaluation. During my tenure as editor in chief of *JFQ*, I have seen both sides of the debate and several valuable contributions that propose how the law might be improved.⁷ Recent discussions in the Pentagon have returned to familiar themes of previous reforms—reductions

in the number of generals and admirals (as the United States had proportionally fewer in World War II), fewer combatant commands to achieve more centralized control over larger portions of the globe, and fewer joint agencies to streamline the bureaucracy that proponents of these reductions believe is the source of lengthy timelines for everything from weapons procurement to deployments. A 2025 policy paper⁸ from the Mitchell Institute at the Air and Space Forces Association suggests a rebalancing of authorities back to favoring the Service Chiefs; the authors believe Goldwater-Nichols has proved detrimental to the Service Chiefs' ability to effectively organize, train, and equip their formations for deployment in joint operations as well as administer the acquisition arena. Recent moves by the Pentagon, particularly in the dismantling of the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System, indicate movement in this direction. Reform discussions also center on joint personnel management.

But what matters most should be how well the joint force executes its missions in furtherance of U.S. national interests. The push for the original Act was clearly to address perceived inter-Service rivalry that led to operational failures and continual maneuvering of the Services to gain prominence in their respective mission sets. Recent combat experience must be viewed through the jointness lens to assess the wisdom of 1986 and what reforms might be needed. I would offer that you—the readers of *JFQ*—are best positioned to do some of the intellectual lifting needed, just as Colin Powell suggested in the first edition back in 1993.⁹ Effective reform needs champions and experts from the tactical line to the E-ring of the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. Where do you see the future of jointness headed? When you believe you have a good sight picture, send us your best shot. All we can offer is a thorough and lively debate in these pages, as Powell suggested.

This issue's Forum offers you three valuable and weighty articles on cyber, ethics in warfighting, and operational craft that I am sure you will find interesting

and useful. *JFQ* alumna Emily Goldman and Robert Grossman make the case for the effective use of data analysis to achieve superiority in joint warfighting. Adding to his tremendous contributions to the study of the operational level of war, U.S. Naval War College Professor Milan Vego brings us his latest thoughts on how to develop operational warfighting objectives. Updating his National War College monograph that NDU Press published a decade ago,¹⁰ Professor Emeritus Mark Clodfelter writes about a clash of personalities at the highest levels during the Vietnam War. His research shows that this clash improperly resulted in the demotion and retirement of a four-star general, which many of a certain age will remember as a case study in ethical conduct at Air University's colleges. History rarely stands still, it seems, with a requirement for constant reevaluation of facts that come to light even decades after the events.

JPME Today has two excellent pieces that focus on how we think about the issues of joint warfighting, strategy development, and the role that joint professional military education (JPME) plays in each. From NDU's Eisenhower School, James Davitch writes about how we can best prepare our warriors for defending in the battlespace of the mind. A team of current and former U.S. Naval War College faculty—Joseph Gagliano, Derek Reveron, Nikolas Gvosdev, Rebecca Russo, and Dana Struckman—discusses how JPME helps develop strategists who can best meet the threats of the future.

Our authors in this issue's Commentary focus on innovations needed to improve our Nation's operational effectiveness at war by changing how we sustain the warfight and how we command and control our forces as they fight. Starting with the warrior, Robert D. Seader—a recent graduate of NDU's Eisenhower School—discusses U.S. Special Operations Command's system of agile acquisition for the battlefield as a model with applications for the Services. With a case study focused on defending the Arctic airspace, Jeffrey Kempff suggests the best way to consolidate

several operations under a single joint commander. To close, Alexis Johnson—another recent Eisenhower School graduate—offers her views on how best to reform defense industry mobilization and sustain the support portion of our weapon systems through a Civil Reserve Sustainment Readiness Program.

In the Features section, you will find two interesting articles on medical issues. A growing number of authors from the medical community have been submitting manuscripts to *JFQ* and having substantial success, and this issue is no exception. First, Michael Ackman and Jon Fowler offer their recommendations on how to improve medical logistics in support of joint warfighting. In what has to be a first anywhere, Andrew Hall, Michael Carrillo, Garrison Jackson, Jennifer H. Hall, and Ryan Comes discuss how to leverage artificial intelligence for optimizing blood acquisition and distribution in combat environments.

Along with three important book reviews, our Recall section closes out this issue with a very interesting look by Justin Blanton on how the USS *Kitty Hawk* was used as a forward staging base in the opening of the war in Afghanistan.

As this will be my last edition of *JFQ* after nearly 16 years as its editor in chief, I wanted to thank everyone involved with the production of the Chairman's journal over the last 60 issues. First, to former NDU President Vice Admiral (Ret.) Ann Rondeau and my first civilian boss, Dr. Hans Binnendijk, thank you for giving me this great job and convincing me I was the right person for it. The admiral would have six successors who supported our mission. Hans would have seven successors—including Dr. Denise Natali, who holds the record for being my civilian supervisor (twice!)—all of whom continued his faith in my leadership and judgment; thank you all. To the writers and reviewers of the nearly 2,000 submissions we have received since fall 2010 when I signed in, thank you for your contributions to the Chairman's journal. To NDU Press's publishing partner, the Creative Services Division of the U.S. Government Publishing Office,

thank you for the artistic wonder you have given us over the years.

Finally, I cannot overstate my gratitude and love for my teammates at NDU in all of its schools and components and among headquarters staff. As I complete more than 20 years here with NDU—first at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk in my final military assignment and then here in DC—I have been honored to meet the top leaders of our military, to serve with the great people who make JPME the wonder it is, and to teach and mentor many of NDU's students who have taken or will take the reins of senior leadership while carrying the best of the tools we tried to give them for their careers ahead. What a gift these two decades have been.

To my NDU Press crewmates of the past—in order of service time with me, Jeff Smotherman, John Church, Joanna (Joey) Seich, Jim Peters, George Maerz, Cal Kelley, Lisa Yambrick, Andrea Connell, Tara Parekh, Frank Hoffman, Sarah Frank, Erin Sindle, Jack Godwin, Patricia Strait, and Tom Lynch—you all set me up for success in this effort and sustained me through good times and bad. Finally, to my current crew—Christine Moritz, Latosha Adams, Laurie Morrissey, and Jaime Gosnell—thank you for listening to all my stories and for your continued service to the best journal of its kind in the world. Good luck, success in all you do, and keep thinking joint! **JFQ**

— William T. Eliason, *Editor in Chief*

Notes

¹ GovTrack.us, "H.R. 3622 (99th): Goldwater–Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986," GovTrack.us, last updated November 11, 2018, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/99/hr3622/summary>.

² GovTrack.us, "H.R. 3622 (99th)."

³ William T. Eliason, "In Memoriam: David C. Jones," *Joint Force Quarterly* 72 (1st Quarter 2024), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Joint-Force-Quarterly/Joint-Force-Quarterly-72/Article/577471/in-memoriam/>.

⁴ David C. Jones, "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," *Armed Forces Journal*, March 1982. This *Armed Forces Journal* article was republished from *Directors and Boards*,

February 1982; see David C. Jones, interview by Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff, October 21, 1987, 25, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/oral_history/OH_Trans_JONESDavid%2010-21-87.pdf; David C. Jones, "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 138 (editorial note), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27547798>. The article in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* is an expanded version of the one published in *Directors and Boards* and *Armed Forces Journal*.

⁵ David C. Jones, interview by David Halloran, "Q&A—Gen. David C. Jones: The Joint Chiefs Need a Stronger Chairman," *New York Times*, February 24, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/02/24/us/q-a-gen-david-c-jones-the-joint-chiefs-need-a-stronger-chairman.html>.

⁶ David C. Jones, "Past Organizational Problems," *Joint Force Quarterly* 13 (Autumn 1996), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-13.pdf>.

⁷ For example, see Christopher G. Marquis et al., "The Advent of Jointness During the Gulf War: A 25-Year Retrospective," *Joint Force Quarterly* 85 (2nd Quarter 2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1130670/the-advent-of-jointness-during-the-gulf-war-a-25-year-retrospective/>.

⁸ Richard B. Andres with T. Michael Moseley and Larry Stutzriem, *A Call for a New NSC-68 and Goldwater–Nichols Reform* (Arlington, VA: Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, 2025), https://www.mitchellaerospacepower.org/app/uploads/2025/01/GNA_Reform_Policy_Paper_57-FINAL.pdf.

⁹ Colin L. Powell, "A Word From the Chairman," *Joint Force Quarterly* 1 (Summer 1993), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-1.pdf>.

¹⁰ Mark Clodfelter, *Violating Reality: The Lavelle Affair, Nixon, and the Parsing of the Truth*, Case Study, National War College, NDU (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2016), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/718055/violating-reality-the-lavelle-affair-nixon-and-the-parsing-of-the-truth/>.