



U.S. Air Force (Scott Ash)

Improving Joint Fires for Special Operations A Mandate for the Joint Force Fires Coordinator

By MICHAEL WASTILA

Though great strides have been made since joint doctrine was legislated by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, joint fire support coordination still presents a quandary. The need for a principal advisor having responsibility for the planning and execution of

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Wastila, USMCR, is currently serving as Senior Watch Officer for the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton Crisis Action Center.

joint fires echoes across military academia; however, joint doctrine is lax in addressing the matter. Nowhere is this need more apparent than at the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), where coordination is bifurcated at best. At the JSOTF, doctrine relegates management of joint fires and air support to a component of singular purpose, lacking inclusion of all fire support elements (FSEs) as a result. Institutionalization of a Joint Force Fires Coordinator (JFFC) as part of the JSOTF headquarters (HQ) within the Operations Directorate (J3) will improve the successful

integration, synchronization, and control of joint fires in support of special operations.

Fundamentals

Revisiting accepted principles of joint fire support, joint fires are weapons systems used during the employment of forces from two or more components in coordinated action to produce desired effects in support of a common objective. Coordinated action requires the synchronization of joint fires with the maneuver force, as they are complementary functions. The concept of fires describes

how the joint force applies lethal and nonlethal fires to achieve desired effects and attain the objective.¹ Lethal fires are categorized by delivery means such as fixed-wing aircraft, attack helicopters, unmanned aircraft, missiles, rockets, cannon artillery and mortars, and naval surface fire support. Nonlethal fires are broadly delineated as information operations (IO), which include electronic attack, computer network attack, and the like.

Joint Force Commanders (JFCs) commonly view fire support coordination in relation to four essential tasks. First and foremost, fires must support and be responsive to forces in contact. Second, joint fires must support the JFC's concept of operations. Third, the concept of fires must integrate with the scheme of maneuver. Lastly, fires in support of the joint force must be sustainable.² The coordination of joint fires is crucial to the JSOTF given the need to plan, synchronize, and deconflict diverse assets from air, land, and maritime components, as well as those from multinational forces. Practically, unity of effort is only achievable with respect to these essential tasks through the implementation of a JFFC whose authority ensures inclusion of all FSEs and is dismissive of parochial component views.

Doctrine

The JFC establishes a JSOTF to conduct special operations in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve diplomatic, informational, military, and/or economic objectives, activities that "may require low visibility, clandestine, or covert capabilities."³ In general, small, specially organized units manned by personnel with unique expertise, training, and equipment make up Special Operations Forces (SOF). A JSOTF includes SOF from more than one Service and conducts operations with, or augmented by, conventional forces as necessary. SOF are limited in numbers so focused efforts are essential to preserve the force. Accordingly, joint fire support is a critical capability and force multiplier for the JSOTF. Amazingly, for such a highly specified organization, coordination of joint fires is doctrinally deficient and too often overlooked. To date, "no theater special operations commands have standing joint fires coordination centers,"⁴ and JSOTF HQs are minimally staffed with joint fires expertise.

Organization of a JSOTF HQ is consistent with that of a conventional Joint Task Force (JTF). The J3 forms a Joint Operations Center (JOC) to serve as the focal point for all operational matters to include the direction of current operations and the planning of future ones. A JSOTF may include a Future Plans Directorate (J5). If not, the J3 assumes all future planning responsibilities; if so, the J3 Future Operations Section (J35) receives approved plans in handover from the J5 for tasking and execution. Doctrine specifies only that joint fire support coordination falls under the responsibilities of the J3. The J35 directs JSOTF targeting and integrates IO into future operations.⁵

The J3 is responsible to "plan, synchronize, and deconflict joint fires and joint air support within the JSOTF, [forming] a Joint

tion. The discord stems from governing joint doctrine because responsibility for the JFC's concept of fires is unspecified.¹⁰ For reasons more related to airspace management, this responsibility defaults to the air component commander, whose focus naturally gives primacy to aviation fires. Since the JSOTF organizes in a manner similar to a conventional JTF, it takes its lead from joint doctrine in this regard.¹¹ The JSOTF's comparatively less robust table of organization, lack of operational depth, and dependence on nonorganic fire support assets amplify this discord. Without JFFC oversight, special operations planners overlook available fires resources and tend toward crisis action, ultimately reducing mission effectiveness.

Operation *Desert Storm* exemplifies the gap created when the air component drives

the story of Black Hawk Down offers a prolific case where a small-scale raid lacking adequate fires resources turned into a rescue and spiraled into an epic debacle

Fires Element (JFE) and a Joint Air Coordination Element (JACE)⁶ as necessary. This is consistent with global doctrine governing joint fire support where the JFE is an *optional* staff element comprised of representatives from J3 sections, directorates, and components as necessary.⁷ When established, the JFE helps manage fires within the Joint Special Operations Area (JSOA). Regardless, JSOTF doctrine effectively defaults the coordination and deconfliction of joint fires and airspace to the J3, JACE, and the Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE).⁸ The JACE specifically focuses on airpower integration and capabilities; its joint fires expertise is limited to air attack. The SOLE works directly for the JSOTF commander and is located at the theater Joint Air Operations Center (JAOC). It provides visibility of JSOTF activities to the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) staff for coordination, synchronization, and integration of SOF air, surface, and subsurface operations. Notably, the SOLE lacks authority to execute command and control over any SOF element.⁹

Anecdotal Evidence

Whether it is the Gulf War, Somalia, Afghanistan, or Iraq, the lack of a JFFC to advise the JSOTF commander on fire support usage plagues mission planning and execu-

tion. During *Desert Storm*, SOF were relegated to secondary missions within the conventional scheme of operations or left isolated altogether, as with the JSOTF formed for the "great Scud hunt" in the western Iraqi desert.¹² "No concerted effort was made to coordinate the actions of airpower and SOF to suppress launches."¹³ Targeting and fire support coordination were the responsibility of the JFACC whose focus was the integration of airspace, not with ground elements.¹⁴ History views the mission as ineffective given the successful launch of over 80 Scuds at Israel and Saudi Arabia; no hard evidence exists to support that any coalition air attacks resulted in interdiction.¹⁵ JSOTF Scud-hunting operations failed to integrate SOF activities with aviation fire support. Unity of effort was impaired by inadequate JSOTF participation in the targeting process and development of the fire support plan, both key responsibilities of a JFFC.

The story of *Black Hawk Down* and Task Force Ranger in Somalia offers a prolific case where a small-scale raid lacking adequate fires resources turned into a rescue and spiraled into an epic debacle. Formed around staffers from the Joint Special Operations Command, the JSOTF HQ opted for a junior fire support officer. Arguably, the advice of a senior JFFC would have weighed more significantly in the



Marine Corps M1A1 Abrams tank conducts live-fire training during interoperability exercise with Moroccan armed forces

U.S. Air Force (Sean M. Worrell)

JFC's decision to conduct operations without contingency fire planning. The debate rages as to the appropriateness of daylight use of gunships or whether AC-130s could have been allocated to the task force.¹⁶ However, a JFFC with authorities granted by the JFC surely would have prevailed in securing some alternate means to cover the ill-fated raid of October 3, 1993. Any number of platforms could have carved out a corridor of fire by which to escape;¹⁷ in hindsight, collateral damage and loss of life would have been lessened. Fixation on the gunships likely led to a misperception as to the availability of fire support—naval surface fires comes to mind. Regrettably, Task Force Ranger's willingness to go it alone highlights SOF's greatest limitations, a lack of operational depth, and a dependence on nonorganic fires to close such gaps.

The experience of Task Force Dagger, the lead JSOTF employed early in Afghanistan, offers a more recent example. This JSOTF staff "was built around a Special Forces group HQ and faced problems using joint fires

at the tactical and operational levels" from the onset.¹⁸ In a repeating theme, the JSOTF HQ staff lacked the resident expertise to "handle the integration—incorporating joint fires in campaign planning, collating or submitting subordinate fires requests, and deconflicting operations."¹⁹ Absent institutionalized joint fires planning, SOF applied hastily improvised fire support solutions to unanticipated circumstances. Ultimately, the JSOTF relied on the SOLE for deconfliction and integration.²⁰ Though resilient, repeated SOF dependence on ad hoc fires solutions and surrogate coordination borders on dereliction. Crisis response in lieu of a sustainable concept of fires fails to evaluate all fire support options. The SOLE lacks the planning and coordination intimacy inherent to a resident JFFC. The SOLE's separation in both time and space from the JSOTF JOC further degrades mission effectiveness. The mandate for a JFFC is readily apparent.

Fallacy

The lack of a JFE by default leaves JSOTF fire support coordination to the air compo-

ment via the JACE and SOLE. Inclusion of a JFE bifurcates responsibilities for planning and execution. Complicating matters further is the fact that doctrine limits targeting and IO responsibilities to the J35. Implications with respect to unity of effort are obvious. In the absence of a bona fide JFFC acting as an honest broker, the joint fires process inevitably focuses on airpower while inadvertently ignoring surface- and sea-based assets,²¹ not to mention nonlethal means. A JFFC also bridges the doctrinal fissure by assuming responsibility for J35 fire planning tasks and following them through to execution.

As conceived, the JFE is an ad hoc organization largely formed from the existing table of organization. This burdens already overtasked staffs, often creating a void during deliberate planning.²² The lack of a resident JFFC responsible for planning, coordinating, and executing the full spectrum of joint fires elements leaves the J3 and employed SOF vulnerable, having to improvise solutions to the integration challenges of fire support and maneuver. Though hasty innovation may be



USS Sterett launches Tomahawk Land Attack Missile during system test

U.S. Navy (Stephen J. Zeller)

effective for some crisis action, it is reactive and generally contributes to a greater loss of initiative, not unlike *Black Hawk Down*. In contrast, effective joint fire support coordination is proactive where integration is thorough and derived from the inclusion of all component fires elements available. JSOTFs have long “recognized need for resident expertise with their HQ to coordinate and integrate fire

of the myriad joint fires platforms available. The JFFC also offers a sobering perspective when a concept of fires is inadequate.

Counterargument

Aviation proponents seek to employ air assets in a centralized manner to maximize their effect. Indisputably, “close air support accounts for the vast majority of fire

JACE through the Joint Special Operations Air Component to the JAOC, aided by the SOLE. The JFACC is the airspace coordination authority and is responsible for the Air Tasking Order (ATO), which deconflicts airspace and avoids unnecessary redundancy in target attack.²⁵ This being the case, it seems valid that the air component should dominate those tasks required to synchronize joint fires in support of the JSOTF. Additionally, the JFACC may simply be better equipped to integrate joint fires due to organic attack, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and unmanned aerial systems capabilities.

By contrast, JSOTF operations are not air-centric; they typically center on a supported ground maneuver element. SOF requires the concept of fires to be nimble; however, the current requisition process is clumsy and burdensome. Further, one could argue the parochial air component view contributes to a misperception that fire support platforms other than air have limited capability and/or availability. The JFACC is a component commander and is certainly not beholden to the JSOTF commander. Higher responsibilities may preclude JAOC participation in JSOTF fires deliberation and planning. In addition, the SOLE lacks the proximity, capacity, and authority to control the joint fire situation throughout an operation and participate in the planning and coordination of future operations, often concurrent tasks. In sum, “the entity responsible for [joint] fires cannot be focused on only one aspect of the fires fight”;²⁶ it leads to an overemphasis of prosecution by air.

Improvements

A study prepared by the Joint Warfighting Center (JWFC) examined the viability of a JFFC concept from the viewpoint of the JFC. It clearly identified the fact that the J3 and JFACC worked independently to plan, coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize targeting. Although both worked toward common objectives, they lacked unity of effort. The 1997 study also documented the resulting disconnect between air operations and all elements of joint fires. The study acknowledged the J3 as the focal point for synchronization of joint fires but recognized that in practice, the JFACC retains the bulk of effort for joint fires execution planning through the development of the ATO. Further, it suggested, “the JFACC has some limitations regarding control of all

the entity responsible for [joint] fires cannot be focused on only one aspect of the fires fight

support.”²³

Moreover, the absence of a JFFC to formally advise the commander on fire support matters arguably contributes to the willingness to go it alone, a tragic flaw seemingly all too common among SOF. A JFFC ensures implementation of fire support plans cognizant of the JSOTF’s inherent lack of organic fires capabilities. The JFFC creates operational depth through the procurement and inclusion

support assets provided to Special Forces.”²⁴ Advocates attribute this to required coverage distances and the limited availability of capable fire support platforms for JSOA such as in Afghanistan or Iraq. With the preponderance of air assets categorized in terms of fires, relinquishing control of the coordination process constrains greater employment of these assets. Ultimately, requests for air support flow from the JSOTF via the

joint fires resources and awareness of special operations and nonlethal strategies, thus an opportunity may exist to not consider all joint fires aspects during development of the air plan.²⁷ The study concluded that the targeting process has become an air-driven event, with little consideration for the employment of other platforms—a finding of extreme consequence for end users such as the JSOTF, feeding the fallacy that assets are simply unavailable.

The JWFC study recommended, “The JFC needed a JFFC to be the impartial arbiter for joint fires, manage scarce resources, ensure the commander’s guidance is being followed and intent accomplished, maintain a focus on what to preserve or destroy, deconflict lethal and nonlethal fires, champion JFC fires needs, and help the JFC maintain situational awareness.”²⁸ A JFFC offers further value added by assisting the J3 and JFC in synchronizing joint fires with other aspects of the campaign to include maneuver, communications, IO, and logistics. These findings for the greater joint force structure multiply for the JSOTF given the additional nodes of coordination imposed by the air component above.

To improve the successful integration, synchronization, and application of fires for the JSOTF, a JFFC must be institutionalized as a permanent part of the HQ staff serving as a senior subordinate to the J3 with authorities delegated by the commander. A JFFC, being the single entity that centralizes communications and personnel for the coordination of all FSEs, obviates air component awareness and control issues. At a minimum, an FSE comprised of a junior fire support officer, air officer, naval surface fires officer, and IO officer would support the JFFC, thereby covering the totality of joint fires capabilities. The FSE remains scalable to meet the scope and needs of the JSOTF. The Service components, having requisite expertise, would source the various personnel.

The JFFC serves as the principal staff advisor to the J3 and JSOTF commander responsible for the coordination, integration, and synchronization of joint fires.²⁹ Over the phases of an operation, the JFFC, aided by the FSE, formulates and disseminates the concept of fires. They constantly monitor and control the joint fires situation throughout the operation. A key JFFC responsibility is overseeing the joint targeting coordination board and balancing the component desires concerning attack and interdiction. The JFACC would

continue to control general air operations and oversee the coordination and execution of ensuing air attack means in support of the approved fires plan.

Changes

To date, the JWFC study recommendation for the implementation of a JFFC has only been embraced as optional. Doctrine must capture the preceding improvements with revisions to Joint Publications 3–09, *Doctrine for Joint Fire Support*, and 3–05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*. However, joint doctrine in and of itself may not be enough, especially if said doctrine is only viewed as *guidance*. A mandate for the JFFC at the JSOTF may require a Department of Defense directive to enforce what is ultimately a change in special operations culture, particularly for the air component. JSOTF tables of organization and joint manning documents also require changes to reflect this staff enhancement. It follows that these changes must become manifest in training. It is essential that the JSOTF via the JFFC incorporate joint fire support training at the tactical and operational levels to maximize exposure and integration through education, exercises, rehearsals, and the like. Lastly, it is incumbent on U.S. Special Operations Command and/or theater special operations commands to demand qualified individuals/augmentees when staffing JSOTFs; an insouciant approach to filling JFFC billets invites the specter of failure into the joint fire planning process.

Implementation of a JFFC within the J3 will improve the successful integration, synchronization, and control of joint fires in support of the JSOTF. The mandate for a JFFC is clearly supported given the JSOTF’s lack of operational depth and resulting dependence on nonorganic fire support platforms. The JFFC provides an unbiased expert perspective that avoids the myopic shortcomings of fire planning dependent on the air component for coordination. Principal advice and well-conceived concepts of fires will preclude the JSOTF commander from having to go it alone and rely on ad hoc solutions for fire support. Institutionalization of the JFFC as the subject matter expert having the delegated authority and responsibility for planning, coordination, and execution is the required next step toward improving joint fires for special operations. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Joint Publication (JP) 3–09, *Joint Fire Support* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), 1–2.

² Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3–16, *Fire Support Coordination in the Ground Combat Element* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2001), 1–2.

³ JP 3–05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2007), xi.

⁴ Eric Braganca, “The Evolution of Special Operations Joint Fires,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 35 (2004), 67.

⁵ JP 3–05.1, II–11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II–14.

⁷ JP 3–09, x.

⁸ JP 3–05.1, III–8.

⁹ Lynn P. Peitz, “The Next Joint Challenge: Commanding and Integrating SOF Fires When the JFACC is the Supported Commander,” research report, Air Command and Staff College, Montgomery, AL, 2005, 11.

¹⁰ Dewey A. Granger, “Coordination of Future Joint Fires: Do We Need a Joint Fire Support Coordinator?” paper, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 1999, 3.

¹¹ JP 3–05.1, xii.

¹² Thomas K. Adams, *U.S. Special Forces in Action* (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), 234.

¹³ Peitz, 4.

¹⁴ Granger, 6.

¹⁵ Peitz, iv.

¹⁶ Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2000), 417.

¹⁷ Clifford E. Day, “Critical Analysis on the Defeat of Task Force Ranger,” research paper, Air Command and Staff College, Montgomery, AL, 1997, 20.

¹⁸ Braganca, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Timothy M. Parker, “Making Joint Fires,” paper, Naval War College, Newport, RI, 2002, 5.

²² Granger, 12.

²³ Jason D. Adams, Deric Holbrook, and Seth Knazovich, “Fire Support for the Special Operations Task Force,” *Fires* (January–February 2010), 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁵ Granger, 11.

²⁶ Parker, 11.

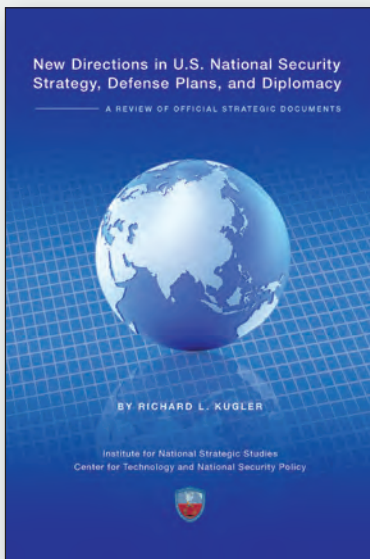
²⁷ *Joint Forces Fires Coordinator Study* (Fort Monroe, VA: Joint Warfighting Center, 1997), EX–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, EX–4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, V–1.

NEW
from **NDU Press**

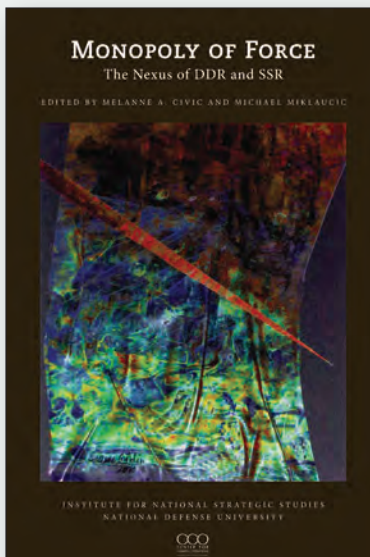
**Center for Technology and National Security Policy
Institute for National Strategic Studies**



New Directions in U.S. National Security Strategy, Defense Plans, and Diplomacy: A Review of Official Strategic Documents

by *Richard L. Kugler*

In 2010, seven major studies were issued that together put forth a comprehensive blueprint for major global changes in U.S. national security strategy, defense plans, and diplomacy. The seven studies include the *National Security Strategy*; *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*; *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century*; *Nuclear Posture Review Report*; *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*; and *NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement*. These studies are brought together in this one book, which portrays their individual contents and complex interrelationships and evaluates their strengths and shortfalls. It argues that while these studies are well written and cogent in articulating many valuable innovations for the Departments of Defense and State, and other government agencies, all of them leave lingering issues that require further thinking and analysis as future U.S. national security policy evolves in a changing and dangerous world.



**Center for Complex Operations
Institute for National Strategic Studies**

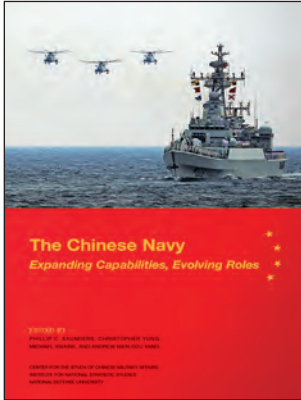
Monopoly of Force: The Nexus of DDR and SSR

edited by *Melanne A. Civic and Michael Miklaucic*

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) have emerged in recent years as promising but poorly understood mechanisms for consolidating security and reasserting state sovereignty after conflict. Despite the considerable experience acquired by the international community, the critical relationship between DDR and SSR, and the ability to use these mechanisms with consistent success, remain less than optimally developed. The chapters in this book represent a diversity of field experience and research in DDR and SSR, which suggest that these are complex and interrelated systems with underlying political attributes. The book concludes that successful application of DDR and SSR requires the setting aside of preconceived assumptions or formulas, and should be viewed flexibly to restore the monopoly of force to the state.



Visit the **NDU Press** Web site for more information on publications at ndupress.ndu.edu



NEW from NDU Press

The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles

edited by Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has moved to the forefront of Chinese military modernization, aided by increased budgets and improved shipbuilding capabilities. The deployments of PLAN ships to the Gulf of Aden, the PLAN's global circumnavigation, and the increased frequency of exercises with foreign navies highlight the PLAN's growing role as an instrument of national policy. Given these trends, the Institute for National Strategic Studies joined other research organizations in Taipei to discuss the Chinese navy in their 19th annual conference on the PLA. The conference brought together many leading specialists on naval issues to discuss a range of topics related to the PLAN. This volume collects the best papers, most of which have been updated to reflect postconference developments. Topics include the history of other rising major powers in relation to their maritime capabilities, the range of China's naval modernization, the specifics of PLAN force capabilities, and how the PLAN might use its improved capabilities. As this volume indicates, Chinese naval power continues to develop, expand, and mature despite shortfalls in operational effectiveness. Given regional suspicions about China's long-term ambitions, the ultimate impact of a stronger PLAN on stability will depend on whether Chinese leaders direct their newfound naval power toward cooperative or coercive ends.



PRISM

A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations

PRISM 2, no. 4 (September 2011) offers the following Feature articles: Joseph L'Etoile on transforming the conflict in Afghanistan; Paul Collier on job creation and investment promotion aspects of state-building; Leon Fuerth on "anticipatory governance"; Carlos Ospina Ovalle with an update on the insurgency in Colombia; Montgomery McFate and Steve Fondacaro on the human terrain system; Kimberly Marten on patronage versus professionalism in new security institutions; Laura Varhola and Christopher Varhola on regional engagement in Africa; and Michael Aaronson, Sverre Diessen, Yves de Kermabon, Mary Beth Long, and Michael Miklaucic on NATO countering the hybrid threat. In From the Field, Nadeem Ahmed presents a case study of the 2009 Malakand operation in Afghanistan. Lessons Learned presents an article by Michael Fischerkeller on the debate over the effectiveness of the Commander's Emergency Response Program, followed by an interview with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers. Closing out this issue, John Coffey reviews Joseph Nye's *The Future of Power* (PublicAffairs, 2011).

PRISM explores, promotes, and debates emerging thought and best practices as civilian capacity increases in order to address challenges in stability, reconstruction, security, counterinsurgency, and irregular warfare. Published by NDU Press for the Center for Complex Operations, *PRISM* welcomes articles on a broad range of complex operations issues, especially civil-military integration. Manuscript submissions should be between 2,500 and 6,000 words and sent via email to prism@ndu.edu.



JOINT FORCE QUARTERLY

Published for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by National Defense University Press
National Defense University, Washington, DC

