



Staff Sergeant Amanda Elsenboss, U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit Service Rifle Team Soldier, won Interservice Individual Championship High Service Woman Title, Interservice 1,000-yard Individual Match (Open Division), and Interservice Individual Long-Range Match during 2017 Interservice Rifle Championships, held from July 26 through August 2 at the Calvin A. Lloyd Range Complex on Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia (U.S. Army/Julius Clayton)

The Psychology of Jointness

By Charles Davis and Kristian E. Smith

Jointness is more than a word, it is a mindset.

—GENERAL JEAN-PAUL PALOMÉROS, COMMANDER
NATO Allied Command Transformation

No military in the world can employ the forces of different services in such an integrated and interdependent manner as the U.S. military, and we can attribute this hard-won level of competence, accumulated over decades, to reforms stemming from the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (GNA). These changes led the U.S. military to become the most powerful force

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in the world by compelling it to become the most *joint* force in the world.

The joint force is predicated on the condition of jointness, which is a distinctly mental phenomenon manifest in members of the different Services who not only are practiced in operating jointly but, more important, also believe that doing so will lead to more effective application of military force. Officers embracing such knowledge and willingness are said to possess a “joint attitude and perspective.”¹ Jointness necessarily and rightly builds atop Service culture, and achieving a joint perspective and attitude means officers must prepare to look beyond powerful Service indoctrination if they are to successfully cooperate and collaborate with others from different Service cultures.

Service-centric attitudes and perspectives are antithetical to jointness, and they are overcome through joint education and subsequent experience in joint assignments. Officers must become socialized to the different Service cultures if they are to develop the joint attitudes and perspectives necessary to operate collaboratively and interdependently. Joint acculturation, a central component of joint professional military education Phase II (JPME II), is the process by which officers are taught both the merits and the practice of working effectively within a joint context. This process seeks to transcend Service biases and prejudice by cultivating understanding and appreciation in officers for the cultures, competencies, and capabilities of other military Services and their members. It is also intended to ready officers for subsequent joint duty. Envisioned by GNA and established by law, joint acculturation is the prescribed way officers are called on to transcend Service-centric views and embrace a more unifying joint ethos.

In the 21st century, jointness also reflects a realm for strategic competition. Although the U.S. military ranks as the most capable force in the world, strategic competitors seek to erode this advantage by building greater jointness in their own militaries. The challenging security environment portrayed by the 2018 National Defense Strategy calls for

greater competencies in jointness—not only in theaters at the operational level but also in integrated operations globally from tactical to strategic levels. Yet efforts to create greater jointness have taken a backseat to other initiatives, and the importance of joint acculturation, seems forgotten. We must reverse this trend if the joint force is to achieve the lethality and flexibility demanded by the National Defense Strategy and to maintain military superiority over adversaries into the foreseeable future.

Jointness Is a State of Mind

Jointness is a psychological state characterized by the willingness of members of each branch of Service to trust, collaborate, and operate interdependently with each other to accomplish a shared mission. In this way, joint force commanders can employ the forces and capabilities of the different Services in an integrated and optimal manner, unhindered by Service parochialism. Desires to attain the highest level of military jointness are born of providence. Crises rarely lend themselves to the forces and capabilities of any single Service, and history attests that a force that can operate more jointly can more effectively respond to threats to national interests.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has sought a military force that can operate more jointly. At that time, General Dwight D. Eisenhower presciently observed that “there no longer exists any separate land, air, and sea warfare. It is all one.”² In the decades that followed, efforts to inculcate jointness in officers from the different Services were modest and stumbling, but legislation under the GNA represented a watershed. Following a string of military operations beset by Service parochialism, Congress imposed reforms on a reluctant Department of Defense (DOD) to create a force that would operate more jointly. To say these reforms enabled the U.S. military to become the most joint force in the world is both inarguable and an understatement, and invoking new laws was the only way to overcome the provincialism of the Services. More than

simply clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and processes of DOD, the Services, and the combatant commands, the legislation aimed to foster greater jointness in military officers through joint education. Congress astutely recognized that effective joint operations are possible only if officers can surmount deeply instilled Service-centric attitudes and perspectives to value and consider those of others. Such officers demonstrate the highest level of trust and appreciation for—and interdependence among—those belonging to a different branch of the Armed Forces.

Jointness derives from the trust and understanding Servicemembers place in their fellow Service colleagues as experts in their core competencies, and the psychological realm is where trust and understanding exist and operate.³ Jointness is nothing if not recognized and accepted in the minds of Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen working together to achieve a common mission. As such, a force is joint only to the degree its members internalize jointness; it is this state of mind that enables the effective planning and employment of Service forces operating as an integrated and interdependent whole. Neither unity of command over forces nor a mere collection of platforms and capabilities from the different Services can accomplish this outcome.

Creating jointness relies on lasting and positive psychological change that liberates officers from a Service-parochial mindset to cultivate the joint attitudes and perspectives envisioned by the GNA reforms.⁴ Service culture, like any organizational culture, imparts Service-centric attitudes and perspectives that foster ethnocentrism among members and biases against cultural outsiders.⁵ Such close-minded attitudes and perspectives stand in opposition to jointness and must be supplanted. Instilling joint attitudes and perspectives is the principal outcome of JPME II and results from the structured socialization process that is joint acculturation.⁶

Cultivating Jointness Through Cultural Change

The condition of jointness is contingent on substantive and positive change to



Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 lands to pick up simulated casualty during live-fire exercise with Special Warfare Airmen from 227th Air Support Operations Squadron on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, October 24, 2019 (U.S. Air National Guard/Matt Hecht)

the Service cultural foundation of military officers, because jointness—enabled by intercultural trust and understanding—transcends the core values and beliefs of any specific Service culture. Beginning with initial entry training, each Service indoctrinates its members into a powerful organization, imbuing in them bedrock values and beliefs. These ideals give members a sense of shared mission and purpose and unquestionably enable the supremacy of each Service within its principal domain; however, strong organizational culture also promotes ethnocentrism among its members, and this often produces antipathies toward members of other cultures. In fact, social group membership remains a principal source of harmful bias and prejudice that is often manifest in members' attitudes toward cultural outsiders.⁷

Achieving the intercultural understanding, appreciation, and trust necessary for jointness is difficult, if not impossible, in the presence of Service-centric attitudes and perspectives. So pronounced were the distinct cultures and rivalries at the time of the GNA reforms that each Service expended great effort and formidable resources to sustain and protect its respective missions and capabilities.⁸ Indeed, congressional reform was necessary because DOD found itself paralyzed in its ability to force reform from within.⁹ In 1989, a congressional panel on military education headed by Congressman Ike Skelton, D-MO (commonly referred to as the Skelton Panel), sought to strengthen jointness within the U.S. military; the panel proposed JPME II as the mechanism to achieve “nothing short of a change in the culture of the officer corps,” through an acculturation

process requiring both time and emphasis.¹⁰ The means for achieving the cultural change sought by the Skelton Panel, *joint acculturation* is defined as “the process of understanding and appreciating the separate service cultures resulting in joint attitudes and perspectives, common beliefs, and trust, which occurs when diverse groups come into continuous direct contact.”¹¹ This process enables officers to transcend Service biases and prejudice by instilling in them an understanding of and appreciation for the cultures, competencies, and capabilities of other military Services and their members. Joint acculturation overcomes the hazard of Service cultural rigidity in the joint environment, where military officers remained predisposed to solutions involving only the forces and doctrine of their particular Service.¹² Only in this way can officers rise above Service-centric views

to internalize joint values and beliefs and embrace a more unifying ethos.

The acculturation of officers must also occur well before forces of different Services come together, ideally ahead of initial joint duty, but especially in advance of crisis. The role JPME II plays in this regard is critical. Effecting timely joint acculturation is important and should optimally precede an officer's initial joint assignment that serves to instantiate and reinforce jointness. But this alone is not enough: Each Service should also seek to inspire joint attitudes and perspectives in officers earlier in their careers, to begin sowing the seeds for an eventual reckoning with jointness. Building esprit de corps is essential, but the Services must endeavor to engender this pride without instilling detrimental biases that must later be overcome.

Just as jointness builds atop Service culture rather than displacing it, the aim of joint acculturation is cultural integration rather than assimilation. Its purpose is not to displace one cultural foundation with another.¹³ Cultural integration is where officers avidly seek to participate and contribute in the joint arena yet also strive to maintain their original Service cultural foundation.¹⁴ As well, acculturation stands distinct from enculturation. Where acculturation is the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group, enculturation is the process whereby individuals learn their culture through experience, observation, and instruction. The purpose of this distinction is to say that JPME II aims to *acculturate* while subsequent joint assignments aim to *enculturate* officers through reinforcing experiences with fellow joint officers in environments that demand joint approaches.

Achieving Optimal Joint Acculturation

Joint acculturation is an interpersonal education experience that relies on structured, purposeful, and meaningful contact between members of different Service cultures. In this way, officers gain increased understanding of and appreciation for the capabilities and

the contributions of the other Services, resulting in constructive modification of their Service's cultural beliefs and values. As officers learn, they gradually disabuse themselves of Service-centric attitudes and perspectives, leading to positive behavioral change toward members of other Services.¹⁵ Intercultural understanding and appreciation grow, and the trust between members of Service cultures on which jointness relies increases.

Joint acculturation requires structured intercultural exposure—a deliberate and calibrated “contact” experience. Acculturation approaches must carefully and thoughtfully expose officers to the different Service cultures and their members. For example, wearing uniforms in an academic setting directly exposes other students to some of the most visible artifacts of Service culture, and this diversity invites curiosity and further investigation and query by others to understand. Intermixing students from different Service cultures at every opportunity maximizes intercultural exposure, and joint curriculum must necessarily include material devoted to the discussion and understanding of the different Service cultures and capabilities. The development of this basic intercultural understanding must logically precede the more advanced joint collaborative and team-building portions of a contact experience; officers must engage each other from a common basis of intercultural knowledge and understanding as they work to integrate the different Service forces and capabilities to solve joint problems.

From a scientific perspective, joint acculturation approaches must establish the conditions under which structured intercultural contact is most effective in producing positive psychological change. Social science theory describes four facilitating conditions that, when established, substantially improve acculturation outcomes.¹⁶ The first is that each officer must perceive *equal status* within his particular seminar. This means every officer perceives she has the same opportunity to participate, contribute, and express her views. Social hierarchies hinder

meaningful intercultural engagement by stifling frank and honest discussion through which Service-centric views and approaches are identified and challenged. Therefore, joint acculturation approaches must minimize, if not eliminate, hierarchies of all types among officers in the seminar, to include rank, supervisory relationships, and Service cultural dominance. Seminars should comprise officers of similar rank and reflect compositional balance by Service competency, military specialty, and joint command to the greatest degree.

The next two conditions are *common intergroup goals* and *intergroup collaboration*, which together establish a circumstance of interdependence under which officers from different Services must rely on one another to succeed. These two conditions stipulate that JPME II curricula should provide abundant opportunities for officers to work in balanced joint groups focused on joint problem-solving, writing, and presenting. Officers from different Services must collaborate with, rather than compete against, each other. Exercising interdependence in this way advances mutual intercultural understanding and appreciation. More important, it nurtures the development of interpersonal trust between members of different Service cultures.

Finally, *institutional support* represents an indirect but important condition that influences the effectiveness of acculturation venues. Students must view the JPME II venue as credible and authoritative from joint organizational, faculty, and curricular standpoints. This means having a mission requiring the development of joint attitudes and perspectives, a compositionally balanced faculty team possessing substantial joint experience and credentialed as Joint Qualified Officers, and a curriculum oriented on achieving the level of joint education and training prescribed by statute and policy.¹⁷ Acculturation approaches that eschew these four social conditions risk producing uneven acculturation outcomes at best and reinforcement of harmful Service attitudes and perspectives at worst.

Two essential considerations accompany the discussion of these four social conditions. The first is that the psychological attitude has both cognitive and affective dimensions corresponding to what one thinks and to what one feels, respectively.¹⁸ While joint acculturation involves both cognitive and affective outcomes, the emphasis is on affective change.¹⁹ It is important for officers to *think more positively* of the members of other Services, but it is much more important that they *feel more positively* about them. The difference is the same as knowing what to do in a joint context and wanting to do it, and it reflects the importance of positive affective change.²⁰ The second consideration is that genuine acculturation approaches must balance sufficient duration, intensity, and quality of intercultural contact to enable the development of meaningful personal relationships among members of different groups. Such relationships directly reflect the greater trust existing among officers, and this trust generalizes to others in subsequent joint environments.²¹ Simply put, there are no shortcuts—joint acculturation cannot be rushed or obtained cheaply.

Meaningful and lasting joint acculturation is necessary if officers are to rise above Service-oriented beliefs to embrace a more broadly unifying ethos and effectively contribute to a joint team. Without such socialization, jointness will be muted by Service parochialism when convenient—whether on the field of conflict or in a joint staff.²²

A Realm for Strategic Competition?

To assure national security in an age of Great Power competition, the National Defense Strategy calls for the joint force to become more lethal and flexible; to succeed, it must become more joint. Broader and deeper jointness can result only through greater positive attitudinal change by Servicemembers toward those from different Service cultures, not through investment in advanced capabilities and additional platforms. Jointness minimizes the effect of Service cultural rigidity that

can undermine the efficacy of different forces operating together within a joint context. Joint acculturation is indispensable to achieving a more lethal and flexible joint force because it enables officers to overcome powerful ethnocentrism ingrained in them by their respective Service.

Although the U.S. military enjoys a decades-long head start in building and maintaining operational interdependence between the different branches of Service, strategic competitors such as China are increasing their emphasis and investment to foster greater jointness within their militaries. Their efforts bear witness to the efficacies of jointness that the U.S. military has demonstrated for the past three decades. Through aggressive reforms to the People's Liberation Army, China seeks to create a force capable of "complex joint operations," by focusing greater attention on joint training and joint education to improve the planning and execution of joint operations.²³ Although China faces many obstacles in its pursuit of jointness, its commitment is worthy of note, and DOD should be mindful of moving forward. Likewise, Russia has restructured and made targeted investments in its military over the last decade, producing a force that is much more capable and ready—and this trend is expected to continue.²⁴ Given the changing character of war and the increased investments in asymmetric technologies by strategic competitors, the ability of the joint force to underwrite national security increasingly depends on an officer corps that can develop joint strategies and plans that not only effectively leverage military capability but also are more cogently aligned with other instruments of national power.

In this age of strategic competition, DOD must not squander the lead currently enjoyed over our potential adversaries in the arena of jointness. While potential adversaries have stepped up emphasis on increasing jointness, the U.S. military appears to have stepped backward. The congressional reforms to joint education in 1991 rejuvenated DOD's attitude and approach to

preparing officers for joint duty; however, in the three decades since these landmark reforms, DOD's efforts to achieve a deeper and broader jointness are proving to be a Sisyphean endeavor. Rather than investing in greater jointness, DOD has strayed from the intent of the earlier reforms and remains largely oblivious to joint acculturation and its importance to creating a force that can operate more interdependently. This is evident in the accreditation of myriad programs for the delivery of JPME II, with little regard for their ability to achieve substantive and substantial positive psychological change in the officers attending them.²⁵

Neither is JPME II seen by the Services as preparatory education, and therefore few officers are acculturated before serving in joint duty assignments.²⁶ This means the combatant commands are increasingly manned by officers who remain beholden to the Service-centric attitudes and perspectives detrimental to jointness. Another telling indicator is DOD's repeated attempts in recent years to diminish capacity for joint acculturation by reducing or eliminating the JPME II principal course of instruction at the Joint Forces Staff College.²⁷ These actions signify an institutional devaluation of JPME II—and that an understanding of and appreciation for joint acculturation, its purpose, and the attendant social science remain elusive in DOD. Existing law and military policy neither describe nor define *joint acculturation*, despite many congressional and DOD publications that reference the term.²⁸ This dearth of understanding is harmful to the goal of creating a force that is more joint. Jointness is perishable and must be cultivated continuously.²⁹

The National Defense Strategy testifies that the United States risks losing its military advantage if it does not redouble efforts to create a more lethal force. As long as the Nation possesses separate military Services with distinct organizational cultures, there remains an enduring need to cultivate joint attitudes and perspectives in military officers.³⁰ The psychological realm is a critical domain

for strategic competition. DOD must rediscover the imperative of joint acculturation by creating the level of jointness demanded by the defense strategy and thus preserving the U.S. military's advantage in the 21st century. JFQ

Notes

¹ See House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, *Report of the Panel on Military Education*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 1989. This report extensively describes the importance of officers serving in joint duty assignments to possess a joint attitude and perspective.

² General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Remarks at Armed Forces Staff College Opening Exercises," February 2, 1948.

³ Lawrence B. Wilkerson, "What Exactly Is Jointness?" *Joint Force Quarterly* 16 (Summer 1997), 66.

⁴ This is the language used in Title 10 *U.S. Code*, "Armed Forces."

⁵ Harrison M. Trice and Janice M. Beyer, *The Cultures of Work Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 10–11; see also James M. Olson and Mark P. Zanna, "Attitudes and Attitude Change," *Annual Review of Psychology* 44, no. 1 (1993), 125.

⁶ *Report of the Panel on Military Education*, 4.

⁷ Gordon Willard Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 41.

⁸ James R. Locher III, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 14.

⁹ For more information on the inability of the Department of Defense to implement reforms, see General David C. Jones, *Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee*, House of Representatives, House Armed Services Committee, 97th Cong., 1st sess., February 3, 1982.

¹⁰ *Report of the Panel on Military Education*, 57.

¹¹ This definition was formulated by the Joint Forces Staff College Joint Acculturation Working Group, whose purpose was to formulate a common definition of *joint acculturation* for use by the joint professional military education (JPME) establishment. The Military Education Coordinating Council Working Group approved this definition in October 2017.

¹² *Report of the Panel on Military Education*, 57–59.

¹³ It is beyond the scope of this article to argue whether a joint culture exists. Some argue such a culture would lack many important organizational mechanisms necessary to ensure compliance of Servicemembers with joint norms and values. See David T. Fautua, "The Paradox of Joint Culture," *Joint Force Quarterly* 26 (Autumn 2000), 81–86.

¹⁴ *Integration* means that the original cultural foundation is maintained while one seeks to participate in a larger multicultural social network. See John W. Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology* 46, no. 1 (1997), 5–34. See also Rupert Brown and Hanna Zagefka, "The Dynamics of Acculturation: An Intergroup Perspective," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2011).

¹⁵ This is the basis of Intergroup Contact Theory advanced by social psychologists Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda Tropp. See Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, *When Groups Meet: The Dynamics of Intergroup Contact* (New York: Psychology Press, 2011).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63–65; see also Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 281.

¹⁷ See Title 10 *U.S. Code* § 2155, "Joint Professional Military Education Phase II Program of Instruction," for the required curriculum content of JPME II programs. Also see Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 1800.01E, *Officer Professional Military Education Policy* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, May 29, 2015).

¹⁸ Pettigrew and Tropp, *When Groups Meet*, 92–95; David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Book 2: Affective Domain*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1964), 6–7; see also *Report of the Panel on Military Education*, 195.

¹⁹ Pettigrew and Tropp, *When Groups Meet*, 64, 105.

²⁰ Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 60–61; Intergroup Contact Theory, which addresses intergroup prejudice, specifically recognizes the greater importance of affective attitudinal change over cognitive when it comes to improving intergroup relations.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

²² Fautua, "The Paradox of Joint Culture," 86.

²³ *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2019), ii, 22.

²⁴ Anton Lavrov, "Russian Military Reforms from Georgia to Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, November 2018.

²⁵ Charles M. Davis and Frederick R. Kienle, "Toward a More Lethal, Flexible, and Resilient Joint Force: Rediscovering the Purpose of JPME II," *Joint Force Quarterly* 92 (1st Quarter 2019), 25–26. See also Paul W. Mayberry, William Waggy II, and Anthony Lawrence, *Producing Joint Qualified Officers: FY 2008 to FY 2017 Trends* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), xv. This study notes that some constituencies now question the consistency and quality of educational outcomes across the various accredited JPME II programs due to differences in structure, timing, and student composition.

²⁶ Title 10 *U.S. Code*, § 2152, "Joint Professional Military Education: General Requirements," specifies that JPME programs should focus on preparing officers for joint duty assignments.

²⁷ The Joint Staff has repeatedly sought legislative change to reduce or eliminate the prescribed duration of the JPME II principal course of instruction in Norfolk. Before being blocked by Congress, the Joint Staff also attempted in 2019 to eliminate the opportunity for O4s and junior O5s to receive JPME II at all.

²⁸ See the *Evaluation Report on Joint Professional Military Education Phase II*, no. 98-156 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, June 16, 1998); *Independent Study of Joint Officer Management and Joint Professional Military Education* (Washington, DC: Booz, Allen & Hamilton, 2003); House of Representatives, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, Committee on Armed Services, *Another Crossroads? Professional Military Education Twenty Years After the Goldwater-Nichols Act and the Skelton Panel*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., May 20, 2009; and CJCSI 1800.01E, *Officer Professional Military Education Policy*. These studies and instructions use the term [*joint*] *acculturation* but never describe or define it, and in some cases appear to conflate the process of joint acculturation with its outcome: joint attitudes and perspectives.

²⁹ General Martin E. Dempsey noted that jointness, as enabled by joint-minded officers, remains perishable and must be cultivated. See Martin E. Dempsey, *America's Military: A Profession of Arms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, February 23, 2012).

³⁰ See S. Rebecca Zimmerman et al., *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019).