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Joint Mission-Essential Tasks, **Joint Vision 2010**, Core Competencies, and Global Engagement

Short versus Long View

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IF THE US armed forces are to fight in the future, at the operational or strategic levels of warfare, they will do so jointly. A joint national military strategy sets the requirements for joint plans to be developed in the short term. These plans set objectives for all unified commanders in chief (CINC) in their areas of responsibility (AOR). The requirement that CINCs create various contingency and other plans leads, in turn, to the creation of joint mission-essential task lists (JMETL) by CINC staffs and subordinate joint commands. JMETLs, which identify the performance of specific tasks to execute these plans successfully, are then used by the CINCs and the Joint Staff to identify and fund joint training, determine the direction of joint doctrine development, and provide joint justification for various programs.

With this identification of the CINCs' immediate needs, the Joint Staff has recently moved to a vision of future directions, found

*The views expressed by the author are his alone and do not represent those of the US Atlantic Command.

in the publication *Joint Vision 2010* (*JV 2010*).[1] Requirements provided by the CINCs, services, and Joint Staff, as well as advances that emerging technology hopes to deliver in the next few years, all influenced *JV 2010*.[2] One can use *JV 2010* (for the long run) and JMETLs (for the short run) to identify joint training and programmatic requirements. They will soon play a role in determining joint operational readiness criteria.

The US Air Force has just published its future vision in *Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force*, which also purports to provide guidance for the conduct of future military operations, associated training, and materiel the Air Force will buy.[3] *Global Engagement* is the Air Force's input to joint processes. Like the other services' vision documents, it must come to grips with the new JMETL process, *JV 2010*, and the obvious move to subordination of service training, doctrine development, and procurement to jointness.

This article reviews the concept of JMETLs and joint vision and assesses their impact on the long-range training, procurement, and readiness of the US armed services. Further, it assesses the need for improvements to the current process of identifying needs for training and procurement prioritization that balances the immediate requirements of warfighting CINCs with longer-term interests of the uniformed armed services.

JMETL Development and Planned Uses

One finds scenarios for possible future combat in the current versions of the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Military Strategy*, the *Defense Planning Guidance*, the *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan*, and applicable treaties.[4] Scenarios contained in these documents, in turn, drive contingency planning by the war-fighting unified CINCs, who, after analyzing their various contingency plans and other guidance, derive JMETL tasks. To appear on a CINC's JMETL, a task must be performed by a joint staff or force, derived from a mission assigned to a CINC by higher authority, and considered so critical that failure to successfully complete it would jeopardize the mission.

Similar JMETL development takes place by subordinate joint commanders within the AORs of each CINC. For example, commanders of regional or functional areas would have JMETLs for their staff headquarters. Standing or potential joint task force (JTF) headquarters that plan to operate within a CINC's AOR would also have their own JMETLs. Logically, these subordinate JMETLs would be prepared to achieve joint goals and objectives identified by the CINCs.

Some tasks to be performed by subordinate commands are joint, but others remain primarily under the cognizance of the service component commander. A CINC's air force component commander, such as the commander of Air Combat Command, would have service mission-essential task lists (METL) designed to attain service tasks in support of the CINC. A numbered air force might have a subordinate METL identifying tasks to be completed in support of the air force component commander. It could also have JMETL tasks associated with its role as a potential JTF headquarters in direct support of a CINC.

Some JMETL tasks are combative—others are not. Although the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Military Strategy*, the *Defense Planning Guidance*, and the *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan* contain primary combat missions to be performed by the unified CINCs in their AORs, these CINCs also have other guidance that shapes their priorities. One finds this guidance in such documents as the Unified Command Plan, treaties, and other regional policy documents. Thus, a CINC might have JMETL tasks in support of humanitarian operations, military support to civil authorities, and other similar noncombat missions.

When the CINCs assemble a list of joint tasks—combative and noncombative—within their AORs and determine that these tasks are mission essential, they have thus assembled their JMETL.[5] This list need not be approved by a CINC's service component commanders, who are expected to produce JMETLs that

support their CINC as well as METLs that support their service.

As complicated as this process sounds, it reflects and meets the desires of Congress to subordinate training, equipping, and readiness of the US armed forces to joint warfare. At the heart of this system of JMETL development, however, is the subordination of joint-force and component training, programming, and readiness to meet current contingency plans.[6] In other words, JMETL-based prioritization will result in the training, equipping, and readiness of the US armed forces to meet theoretical contingencies envisaged within the next few years. Such an approach, however, does not take the long view.

Problems with Joint Mission-Essential Tasks

Tactical units, such as squadrons, perform tasks at the tactical level of warfare. Wings perform a combination of tactical-level joint tasks and tactical service tasks. Numbered air forces, as potential JTF headquarters and providers of joint force air component commanders, primarily perform joint tasks at the operational level of warfare. The unified CINC's JMETL contains joint tasks to be performed at the theater/strategic level of warfare, although there are exceptions to this generalization. For the most part, Washington handles national strategic tasks, although CINCs perform this function also.

Military departments have national and theater-/strategic-level responsibilities involving training, equipping, and organizing the US armed services as outlined in various congressional statutes and Department of Defense (DOD) and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) administrative regulations. These include roles specifically assigned to the services in the National Security Act of 1947; Titles 10 and 14 of the US Code; DOD Instruction 5100.1, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components;* and Joint Pub 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces,* as well as other such laws and regulations. These training, equipping, and organizing roles of the services include both short- and long-term efforts and have been referred to as "core competencies."

Because of this long-term responsibility,

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services publish visions such as *Global Engagement* that indicate where they are going in the future. What is the relationship between the services' views of what they need and the views found in *JV 2010?* The services have all agreed with what appeared in *JV 2010;* one view maintains that they need only provide details on what they would do to execute this joint vision. Real joint vision that drives future programmatic requirements is somewhat new and signals a potential major erosion of the prerogatives of the military departments to train, organize, and equip.

Current contingency plans—therefore JMETLs—are driven by current, not emerging, threats. Hence, it is not surprising that the newly issued *JV 2010* and *Global Engagement* are devoid of any mention of limited or regional war or reconstitution against a resurgent or emergent global threat.[7] The spectrum of conflict for which all the armed services have prepared includes global nuclear war (unlikely but at least listed) and, at the high end of the conventional spectrum, a major regional contingency (MRC)—recently renamed major theater warfare (MTW).

Let us recall from the days of the cold war what the armed forces of the United States were supposed to be able to handle.[8] This included global nuclear war as well as global conventional war involving multiple AORs. Until recently, the US military also had a category for regional war—a major war in one AOR. In the "old days," the next lesser category was the MTW—Korea and Southwest Asia. *Global Engagement* makes clear that the *MTW,* not limited or regional war, is now the

most demanding conventional combat scenario for which the Air Force must train and equip.

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Core Competencies

Now that we understand the context of the MTW, we can better comprehend the core competencies of the Air Force. Listed in *Global Engagement*, they include air and space superiority, global attack (rapid strikes anywhere on the globe), rapid global mobility, precision engagement, information superiority, and agile combat support. These competencies, however, are expressed in the context of conventional combat no more demanding than an MTW. They are *not* understood to involve a regional war or global conventional war. Hence, the Air Force must train for and/or procure for the following in the context of an MTW: the air expeditionary force, future concepts for unmanned airborne vehicles with the capability for suppression of enemy air defenses, and agile combat support from the continental United States to a forward theater.

Although the Air Force core competencies contained in *Global Engagement* are compatible with those found in a CINC's JMETLs and in *JV 2010*, the degree of support for those core competencies might strain the otherwise good relationships between Air Force commanders and staffs and joint commanders and staffs. For example, in prioritizing programs that will receive joint support, joint commanders might view global attack as a task that a single composite wing could perform, whereas the Air Force might have a larger capability in mind. Needing to respond only at the MTW level, the joint commander could assume that other non–Air Force assets were available for rapid strikes anywhere in the world; thus, one would need smaller numbers of Air Force units within a bigger joint capability.

Similarly, precision engagement in the context of global nuclear war might have two meanings, depending upon one's view of the requirement. Not long ago the Air Force and the White House agreed on the need for precision nuclear strikes as part of both nuclear war-fighting and deterrent strategies that justified the use of manned bombers capable of penetrating the air defenses of our most worthy potential adversary. Is this view still shared by the Air Force and the White House or JCS?

Would our CINCs, charged by the White House and JCS with nuclear war-fighting and deterrent missions, be able to describe their requirements for nonprecision strikes using only ballistic missiles? Has the national nuclear war-fighting or deterrent strategy shifted towards punishment, thus undermining the need for manned penetrating bombers capable of striking various defended, mobile, or hard targets with precision?

Other Service Issues

One also finds in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps this potential disconnect between new joint requirements and traditional services' views of how to conduct warfare. With an MTW as the most demanding scenario for future combat, would any unified CINC create a JMETL requirement for an Army corps to fight as a single-service force at the three-star level? Or would an Army corps commander more likely operate as a JTF commander?

If future combat at the operational level is joint, then why does Army training still include preparation for combat by three-star corps commanders operating as a single-service force? Does the answer change if we as-

Part of a carrier battle group. Should naval campaigns exist?

sume that operational-level combat in the future is multinational and not necessarily joint? What JMETL or METL requirements of Army corps commanders drive the Battlefield Command Training Program?

This three-star role in combat is not an Army-only issue. The Air Force's view of an air "campaign" involves a single service performing an operational-level mission not required in a joint environment. According to joint doctrine, all campaigns are joint. Thus, a single service would perform only an operation, at most.

Is Blue Flag at the level of a single-service operation, or is it a joint exercise? What are the JMETL or METL requirements of the Air Force to run this exercise? If Blue Flag is more joint than single service, then why does the Air Force run it without the oversight of a CINC?

Similarly, there should be no such thing as a naval campaign, even if naval warfare is multiservice in nature. Today, very few people would acknowledge the existence of a credible military threat to maritime forces in the deep-ocean environment. A unified CINC's contingency plans for an MTW environment would not likely assume credible threats to shipping or naval forces transiting the deep oceans en route to a trouble spot. Therefore, one probably would not find a capability for open-ocean combat against a determined high-seas threat on any unified CINC's JMETL or in any maritime JTF commander's JMETLs designed to support current plans.

If unified CINCs assume a "free ride" across the oceans, there would be no need to train maritime forces to meet hostile open-ocean threats, to program future convoy capabilities, or to assess readiness to cross sea lines of communications in a contested environment. Without any JMETL requirement for such training, should Navy METLs drive Navy or multinational naval training for just such an eventuality?

This Navy issue addresses whether forces should be trained under "most likely" threat conditions or "worst case" conditions. No one questions the need to transit the

oceans; rather, one questions whether training and force procurement should assume the existence of any opposition on the high seas. JMETLs with an MTW as the most demanding scenario would drive Navy training to assume no threat. But Navy METLs might posit a completely different training environment.

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The Air Force issue addresses whether Air Force precision-engagement forces would be required to penetrate sophisticated national or theater air and missile defenses or those associated with preferential defense of specific targets. Current joint guidance discusses "most likely scenarios" but says at the same time to assume "worst case" conditions.[9] Should Air Force METLs assume a set of training conditions associated with combat more robust than an MTW even if no JMETL requirements exist?

The Marine Corps's view of combat now includes operational maneuver from the sea, but the Marines' embracing of maneuver warfare concepts has not been shared by the joint community. Nor is it clear that these concepts have been expressed in terms internalized by the Air Force and Navy.[10] Today, we see the Marines pursuing operational maneuver from the sea and the general concepts of maneuver warfare without a clear mandate from the CINCs' JMETLs or even *JV 2010*.[11] Marines have a history of leading the way in innovative war-fighting concepts, but as regards maneuver warfare, they seem to be leaning forward in the straps. Do parallels in doctrinal development exist within the Air Force?

JMETLs Are Not Enough!

Although the US government and allied nations are doing everything in their power to ensure that the current political-military environment gets no worse—and therefore that the global conventional war and regional war scenarios associated with a resurgent or emergent global threat do not return—this effort might not succeed despite our collective best efforts. If the worst were to happen and a resurgent or emergent global threat or regional war threat did emerge, then the guidance from the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Military Strategy*, the *Defense Planning Guidance*, and the *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan* would change, which in turn would change JMETLs—but only over time. The unified CINC who had previously not considered large numbers of Air Force global-attack forces, manned penetrating bombers, Army corps that would fight as service elements, open-ocean combat in contested seas, or maneuver warfare as mission essential would face the immediate need to have forces trained, equipped, and ready for these tasks.

In such a situation, the unified CINCs would turn to the services for trained and equipped forces to meet the new conditions. That none of these forces might have trained for such conditions of combat or that forces to perform such missions might not exist would exacerbate an already troublesome dilemma. Further, if no hardware existed to support more demanding missions, the situation could become intolerable.

Under congressional, DOD, and JCS mandate, the uniformed services—not the CINCs—are responsible for training, equipping, and organizing the armed forces. These responsibilities are not limited to conditions assumed by the CINCs as they make up their current JMETLs or to the future of combat as envisaged in *JV 2010*. The services have a responsibility to develop a force beyond that required to meet the current threat. In other words, the services have a long-range view as opposed to the short-range view of the unified CINCs.

Because the services have a longer view, they have the primary responsibility for the development of new weapons systems,

evaluation of emerging technologies, and associated research and development functions. The services—not the unified CINCs—have the primary responsibility for the procurement of weapons systems and the equipping of forces for the future. If this function were subordinated to the more short-range view of the JMETL process, or even that found in *JV 2010*, a drastic change would occur in what the armed services buy.

Apparently the new advanced concepts technology demonstration (ACTD) process is removing some procurement decisions from the services. Promising advanced technologies are put directly into the hands of unified CINCs, who must determine military utility and impact on joint doctrine. The ACTD process puts the CINCs rather than the service chiefs initially in the driver's seat on certain major procurement programs. *JV 2010* states that this new joint vision will also have a role in the ACTD process, but that role is still being formulated.

This is not to say that either the long-range service view or the short-range CINC view is superior. On the contrary, the nation needs the input of both if it is to make informed decisions on the allocation of resources to support DOD programs. Nor should the reader infer that the author is advocating the backpedaling of service support for jointness. This article does argue, however, that even in an era of jointness, the nation needs to ensure that the services are able to perform nonjoint and non-mission-essential tasks that may be required in the future. In short, JMETLs are not enough!

How to Determine Service Core Competencies

The *Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions* of 1995 foresaw some of these problems and used the phrase "core competencies" to refer to those tasks in which the services should maintain expertise. The report stated that "core competencies are the set of specific capabilities or activities fundamental to a Service or agency role." It also said that "we affirm the role of the Military Services in developing concepts, doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures that derive from their core competencies." The commission did not feel that service core competencies conflicted with the preparation for joint warfare. Instead, the report said that those core competencies "define the Service's or agency's essential contributions to the overall effectiveness of DOD and its Unified Command" and that they are "a prerequisite to improved joint military effectiveness."[12]

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The core competencies of the uniformed military services are those roles and functions assigned to them by higher authority. They define, for example, the overall responsibility of the individual service in the training, equipping, and organizing of its military forces. This would include, but is not limited to, procurement, mobilization, education and training, preparation of doctrine, organization, personnel management, transportation, and so forth. Most of these competencies are outlined in legislation and administrative regulations that delineate the differences between military departments and combatant commanders. War-fighting core competencies, however, are more difficult to ascertain.

Just what are the specific war-fighting core competencies of each service, and how should they be determined? The Air Force has published its list. The Navy might argue that open-ocean combat is a core competency. The Army might argue that core competencies include the ability to maneuver a corps, while the Marine Corps might argue that it would include the amphibious assault capability for a Marine expeditionary brigade–sized force in an opposed-landing environment.

Should each service have the right to argue for its own version of its war-fighting core competencies, or should it remain supportive of *JV 2010*? Should service core competencies be based upon service or joint doctrine? Perhaps historical use or expected future uses of that service should be the deciding factor. Another approach entails reviewing the legislation and administrative regulations that assign war-fighting roles to the services and deriving tasks from them. After all, if Congress, DOD, or JCS has directed that a service be capable of performing a role or a function, one would assume that it ought to be able to do so.

Whatever the method, the services should agree on a general approach to the problem and understand that their role is complementary to supporting jointness. Services need to support the war-fighting unified CINCs with their abilities to perform current tasks. But they also need to take the long view and maintain capabilities that currently do not appear on the unified CINCs' various JMETLs.

The issue of how much the nation should support the long and short views needs to be consciously addressed with solid analytic methodologies. We must balance the ability to meet current tasks against the need to address potential future threats with emerging technologies and doctrine. Although we probably don't have sufficient resources to adequately fund both, an informed nation can make intelligent choices.

Conclusions

The United States should and could have armed forces that operate jointly. Consideration of service-specific core competencies is not a retreat to the days before the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Jointness is the right answer—but it is not the *only* answer. The basis of sound joint military operations lies in the armed services' mastery of their own core competencies. Only then can they advance to the more complex levels of training and skill required when they operate with each other.

The obvious rub to all this is resourcing. Will the nation provide the resources to build and train a military that is capable of doing more than fighting in an MTW-level scenario? If the answer is no, then the military must provide not only a risk assessment but also a backup plan to handle regional wars and global conventional wars. That plan cannot just assume there will be strategic warning and sufficient time to prepare for more demanding requirements. In the absence of any serious planning to handle more than an MTW and with cost driving the solution, nuclear weapons become the low-cost hedge.□

Notes

1. *Joint Vision 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, c. 1995).

2. Gen John M. Shalikashvili, "A Word from the Chairman," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 12 (Summer 1996): 5.

3. Department of the Air Force, *Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force* (Washington, D.C.: US Air Force, c. 1997).

4. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSINST) 3500.01, *Joint Training Policy for the Armed Forces of the United States*, 21 November 1994, 18; and CJCSINST 3500.02A, *Joint Training Master Plan for the Armed Forces of the United States*, 8 December 1995, A-13.

5. For additional information on JMETL development, see John R. Ballard and Steve C. Sifers, "JMETL: The Key to Joint Proficiency," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 9 (Autumn 1995): 95–98.

6. CJCSINST 3500.02A, A-22.

7. Barton Gellman, "Pentagon War Scenario Spotlights Russia," *Washington Post*, 20 February 1992, 1.

8. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *1990 Joint Military Net Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, c. March 1990), V-1 and V-2; and idem, *1991 Joint Military Net Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 1991), 1-5 and 9-2.

9. CJCSINST 3500.02A, A-3.

10. The Air Force came closest to coming to grips with the concept of maneuver warfare in Martin van Creveld with Steven L. Canby and Kenneth S. Brower, *Air Power and Maneuver Warfare* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, July 1994).

11. *Joint Vision 2010* states that "dominant maneuver" is one of the four new operational concepts required to obtain full spectrum dominance in the next century. A careful assessment of the requirements of dominant maneuver demonstrates that it includes some ideas from maneuver warfare theory but has not fully embraced maneuver concepts.

12. Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 2-4 and 2-20.