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MILITARY PERSONNEL

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Improve Joint Officer Development

Statement of Derek B. Stewart, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-03-548T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on Total Force, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

MILITARY PERSONNEL

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Improve Joint Officer Development

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) has increasingly engaged in multiservice and multinational operations. Congress enacted the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, in part, so that DOD's military leaders would be better prepared to plan, support, and conduct joint operations. GAO assessed DOD actions to implement provisions in the law that address the development of officers in joint matters and evaluated impediments affecting DOD's ability to fully respond to the provisions in the act.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations in this testimony. However, GAO did recommend, in a report that it issued in December 2002 (GAO-03-238), that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness develop a strategic plan that links joint officer development to DOD's overall mission and goals. DOD concurred with the recommendation.

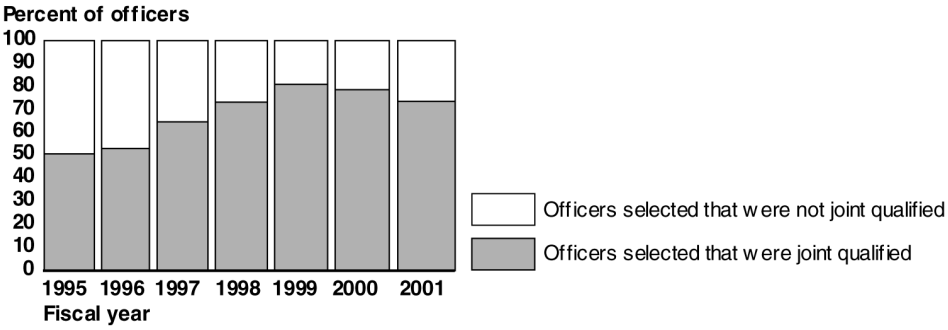
What GAO Found

DOD has not taken a strategic approach to develop officers in joint matters. It has not identified how many joint specialty officers it needs, and it has not yet, within a total force concept, fully addressed how it will provide joint officer development to reserve officers who are serving in joint organizations – despite the fact that no significant operation can be conducted without reserve involvement.

As of fiscal year 2001, DOD has promoted more officers with previous joint experience to the general and flag officer pay grades that it did in fiscal year 1995. However, in fiscal year 2001, DOD still relied on allowable waivers in lieu of joint experience to promote one in four officers to these senior pay grades. (See figure below.) Furthermore, DOD is still not fully meeting provisions to promote mid-grade officers who are serving or who have served in joint positions at rates not less than the promotion rates of their peers who have not served in joint positions. Between fiscal years 1995 and 2001, DOD met more than 90 percent of its promotion goals for officers who served on the Joint Staff, almost 75 percent of its promotion goals for joint specialty officers, and just over 70 percent of its promotion goals for all other officers who served in joint positions.

DOD has met provisions in the act that require it to develop officers in joint matters through education by establishing a two-phased joint professional military education program. The act, however, did not establish specific numerical requirements, and DOD has also not determined the number of officers who should complete the joint education. In fiscal year 2001, only one-third of the officers who were serving in joint organizations had completed both phases of the education. DOD has also increasingly relied on allowable waivers and has not filled all of its critical joint duty positions with officers who hold a joint specialty designation. This number reached an all-time high in fiscal year 2001 when DOD did not fill 311, or more than one-third, of its 808 critical joint duty positions with joint specialty officers.

Percentage of Officers Promoted to General or Flag Rank with Joint Experience between Fiscal Years 1995 and 2001



Source: DOD.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-548T.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5140 or stewartd@gao.gov.

Chairman McHugh and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee to discuss the implementation of legislative provisions addressing joint officer development that are contained in the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.[1] Prior to 1986, the Department of Defense (DOD) primarily operated under a culture in which the four military services educated their officers in service-specific matters, assigned their most talented officers to key service positions, and promoted them to leadership positions within their own service. This arrangement served DOD well when military operations fell primarily within the capabilities of one of the military branches. Given that DOD was increasingly moving toward engaging in joint – multiservice and multinational – operations, however, Congress recognized that cultural change was needed to move DOD away from its service parochialisms toward interservice cooperation and coordination. Congress also believed that DOD needed to better prepare its military leaders to plan, support, and conduct joint operations.

Toward that end, Mr. Chairman, the act has been hailed as landmark legislation, given the significance of the cultural change that it was designed to achieve, and DOD has, in fact, subsequently issued joint vision statements that anticipate an armed force that will be "fully joint: intellectually, operationally, organizationally, doctrinally, and technically."[2] During the 16 years since the act's passage, however, DOD has repeatedly sought legislative relief from the act's provisions that address the development of officers in joint matters and, although it has complied with many of these provisions, it is still experiencing difficulties in implementing some of its joint officer development programs and policies.

Mr. Chairman, in our recently issued report to you on joint officer development, we recommended that DOD develop a strategic plan that will link joint officer development to DOD's overall mission and goals.[3] My statement today will address (1) the need for DOD to develop this strategic plan, (2) the successes and limitations that DOD has experienced

[1] Pub. L. 99-433, Oct. 1, 1986.

[2] Department of Defense, *Joint Vision 2010* and *Joint Vision 2020*, Washington, D.C.

[3] U.S. General Accounting Office, *Military Personnel: Joint Officer Development Has Improved, but a Strategic Approach Is Needed*, GAO-03-238 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 19, 2002).

in promoting officers who have previous joint experience, and (3) the challenges DOD has experienced in educating its officers in joint matters and then filling key positions with officers who have the requisite joint education and experience.

Summary

A significant impediment affecting DOD's ability to fully realize the cultural change that was envisioned by the act is the fact that DOD has not taken a strategic approach to develop officers in joint matters. For example, DOD has not identified how many joint specialty officers it needs and, at the time of our review, DOD had not yet, within a total force concept, fully addressed how it will provide joint officer development to reserve officers who are serving in joint organizations – despite the fact that no significant operation can be conducted without reserve involvement. In addition, the four services have emphasized joint officer development to varying degrees.

As of fiscal year 2001, DOD has, in response to the requirements of the act, promoted more officers with previous joint experience to the general and flag officer pay grades than it did in fiscal year 1995. However, in fiscal year 2001, DOD still relied on allowable waivers in lieu of joint experience to promote one in four officers to these senior pay grades. Furthermore, DOD has made progress, but it is still not fully meeting provisions to promote mid-grade officers (majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels in the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps and lieutenant commanders, commanders, and captains in the Navy) who are serving or who have served in joint positions at rates not less than the promotion rates of their peers who have not served in joint positions. Between fiscal years 1995 and 2001, DOD met more than 90 percent of its promotion goals for officers who served on the Joint Staff, almost 75 percent of its promotion goals for joint specialty officers, and just over 70 percent of its promotion goals for all other officers who served in joint positions.

DOD has met provisions in the act that require it to develop officers in joint matters through education by establishing a two-phased joint professional military education program. The act, however, did not establish specific numerical requirements, and DOD has also not determined the number of officers who should complete the joint education program. In fiscal year 2001, only one-third of the officers who were serving in joint organizations had completed both phases of the education. DOD has also increasingly relied on allowable waivers and has not filled all of its critical joint duty positions with officers who hold a joint specialty designation. This number reached an all-time high in fiscal

year 2001 when DOD did not fill 311, or more than one-third, of its 808 critical joint duty positions with joint specialty officers.

In a letter dated January 28, 2003, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness concurred with our recommendation that DOD develop a strategic plan that links joint officer development to DOD's overall mission and goals.

Background

The intent of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was, in part, to reorganize DOD into a more unified military structure. Within that act, Congress included several provisions that specifically address the promotion of officers serving in joint positions, the education of officers in joint matters,[4] and their assignment to joint organizations. The act also established a joint specialty officer designation for officers who are specifically trained in and oriented toward joint matters.[5] Although the act contains a number of specific requirements, Congress also provided DOD with flexibility in meeting the requirements by granting it waiver authority when it can demonstrate justification.[6] DOD approves waivers on a case-specific basis. These waivers apply to a number of the provisions, including (1) the methods for designating joint specialty officers, (2) the posteducation assignments for joint specialty officers, (3) the assignment of joint specialty officers to critical joint duty positions, and (4) the promotions of officers to the general and flag officer pay grades.

Moreover, Congress has issued follow-on reports and made changes to the law in subsequent legislation. For example, a congressional panel on

[4] Congress defined joint matters as those matters relating to the integrated employment of land, sea, and air forces, including matters relating to national military strategy, strategic planning and contingency planning, and command and control of combat operations under unified command. 10 U.S.C. sec. 668.

[5] There are four methods for an officer to be selected for the joint specialty: (1) An officer completes joint professional military education and subsequently serves in a joint position; (2) An officer who has a military occupational specialty, which is a critical occupational specialty involving combat operations, serves in a joint position and then completes the joint professional military education program; (3) An officer serves in a joint position and then completes the joint professional military education, provided the Secretary of Defense determines a waiver is in the interest of sound personnel management; and (4) An officer completes two joint assignments and the Secretary of Defense waives the joint education requirement. A numerical limitation on the last two waivers is specified in the law. 10 U.S.C. sec. 661.

[6] 10 U.S.C. secs. 619a (b), 661 (c)(3) and (d)(2)(C), 663 (d).

military education issued a report in April 1989 that contained numerous recommendations regarding joint professional military education.[7] Among other things, this panel recommended that the services' professional military education schools teach both service and joint matters and that the student body and faculty at each of the service schools include officers from the other services. DOD has implemented these recommendations. Most recently, Congress amended the law regarding the promotion criteria for officers being considered for promotion to the general and flag officer pay grades.[8] The Goldwater-Nichols Act established a requirement that officers must have served in a joint position prior to being selected for these promotions. The amendment, contained in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, will require most officers being considered for appointment to this grade after September 30, 2007, to complete the joint education program as well.

DOD uses a number of multiservice and multinational commands and organizations to plan and support joint matters. Since passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, officers serving in these commands and organizations have overseen a number of joint and multinational military operations that range from humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping to major operations such as Operation Desert Storm and ongoing operations in Afghanistan. In fiscal year 2001, DOD had a total of 9,146 joint positions. Of these positions, 3,400 positions, or 37 percent, were allocated to the Air Force; 3,170 positions, or 35 percent, were allocated to the Army; 2,004 positions, or 22 percent, were allocated to the Navy; and 572 positions, or 6 percent, were allocated to the Marine Corps.

Officers in pay grades O-4 (majors in the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps and lieutenant commanders in the Navy) and above can receive credit for joint experience when they serve in the Joint Staff, joint geographic and functional commands, combined forces commands, and defense agencies. In addition, the Secretary of Defense has the authority to award joint credit to officers for serving in certain joint task force headquarters staffs.[9] DOD has developed a joint duty assignment list that includes all active duty positions in pay grades O-4 and above in the

[7] Report of the Panel on Military Education of the 100th Congress, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, April 21, 1989.

[8] Pub. L. 107-107, Div. A, Title V, sec. 525 (a), (b), Dec. 28, 2001.

[9] 10 U.S.C. sec. 664 (i).

multiservice organizations that are involved in or support the integrated employment of the armed forces. DOD's policy places limits on the number of positions in the defense agencies and other jointly staffed activities that can be included on the list.

DOD uses a two-phased approach to educate officers in joint matters. It incorporated the first phase of the program into the curricula of the services' intermediate- and senior-level professional military education schools.[10] DOD offers the second phase of the program at the National Defense University's Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia. This phase is designed to provide officers with the opportunity to study in a truly joint environment and to apply the knowledge they gained during the first phase of their joint education. DOD also offers a combined program that includes both phases at the National Defense University's National War College and Industrial College of the Armed Forces in Washington, D.C.

Lack of a Strategic Approach Is Contributing to DOD's Difficulties to Fully Respond to the Act's Intent

A significant impediment affecting DOD's ability to fully realize the cultural change that was envisioned by the act is the fact that DOD has not taken a strategic approach that establishes clear goals for officer development in joint matters and links those goals to DOD's overall mission and goals. This lack of an overarching vision or strategy may continue to hamper DOD's ability to make continued progress in this area. A well-developed human capital strategy would provide a means for aligning all elements of DOD's human capital management, including joint officer development, with its broader organizational objectives.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act not only defined new duty positions and educational requirements but also envisioned a new culture that is truly oriented toward joint matters. Moreover, DOD's Joint Vision 2020 portrays a future in which the armed forces are "fully joint: intellectually, operationally, organizationally, doctrinally, and technically." The key question, today, is how does DOD best seize the opportunity to build on current momentum. In April 2002, the Office of the Secretary of Defense

[10] These schools include the Air Command and Staff College and the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama; the Army Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth, Kansas; the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania; the Marine Corps Command and Staff College and the Marine Corps War College in Quantico, Virginia; and the College of Naval Command and Staff and the College of Naval Warfare in Newport, Rhode Island.

issued the Military Personnel Human Resource Strategic Plan to establish military priorities for the next several years. The new military personnel strategy captures DOD leadership's guidance regarding aspects of managing human capital, but the strategy's linkage to the overall mission and programmatic goals is not stated. DOD's human capital strategy does not address the vision cited in Joint Vision 2020. DOD's human capital approach to joint officer development – if it were linked to its overall mission – would emphasize individuals with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to function in the joint environment.

DOD, for example, has not fully assessed how many joint specialty officers it actually needs. The number of joint specialty officers has decreased by almost 60 percent over the years, from just over 12,400 joint specialty officers in fiscal year 1990 to approximately 4,900 joint specialty officers in fiscal year 2001, yet DOD has a significant backlog of officers who, although otherwise qualified, have not been designated as joint specialty officers. Moreover, without knowing how many joint specialty officers it needs, DOD's joint professional military education system may not be structured or targeted properly. For example, without first defining how many officers should be joint specialty officers – all officers, most officers, or only those needed to fill joint positions – DOD has not been able to determine the number of joint professional military graduates it needs. DOD does not know if the total number of available seats is sufficient to meet its needs or if it will need to explore alternatives for providing joint education to greater numbers of officers.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act states that the Secretary of Defense should establish personnel policies for reserve officers that emphasize education and experience in joint matters.[11] However, at the time of our review, the Secretary of Defense had not yet, within a total force concept, fully addressed how it will provide joint officer development to reserve officers who are serving in joint organizations – despite the fact that no significant operation can be conducted without reserve involvement. Providing education in joint matters to reservists has become increasingly important since 1986, given that DOD has increasingly relied on reservists in the conduct of its mission. Further, with 1.2 million reservists in seven components, they represent almost half of our nation's total force. When the act was enacted, reservists were viewed primarily as an expansion force that would supplement active forces during a major war. In addition,

[11] 10 U.S.C. sec. 666.

the current mobilization for the war on terrorism is adding to this increased use and is expected to last a long time. We interviewed officers at several joint organizations and found that reservists are serving in positions at all levels from the Chief of Staff at one command down to the mid-grade officer positions. Moreover, DOD has identified 2,904 additional positions that it will fill with reservists when it operates under mobilized conditions.

Moreover, data suggest that the four services continue to struggle to balance joint requirements against their own service needs and vary in the degree of importance that they place on joint education, assignments, and promotions. The Air Force, for example, has been able to send a higher percentage of its officers to a joint position after the officers attend a joint professional military education school. In fiscal year 2001, 44 percent of Air Force officers serving in joint positions had previously attended a joint professional military education school. In contrast, 38 percent of Army officers and 33 percent of Navy and Marine Corps officers serving in joint positions had attended a joint professional military education school prior to their joint assignments.

DOD Is Promoting Officers with Joint Experience with Mixed Results

The Goldwater-Nichols Act set a requirement that officers must complete a full tour of duty in a joint assignment, or receive a waiver, prior to being selected for appointment to the general and flag officer pay grade.[12]

DOD's reliance on good-of-the-service waivers,[13] in particular, to promote officers who had not previously served in joint positions is one indicator of how DOD is promoting its general and flag officers. The service secretaries request use of this waiver authority when they believe they have sound justification for promoting an officer who (1) has not completed a full tour of duty in a joint position and (2) does not qualify for

[12] The Secretary of Defense may waive the requirement for (1) officers when the selection is necessary for the good of the service; (2) officers with scientific and technical qualifications for which joint requirements do not exist; (3) medical officers, dental officers, veterinary officers, medical service officers, nurses, biomedical officers, chaplains, or judge advocates; (4) officers who had served at least 180 days in a joint assignment at the time the selection board convened and the officers' total consecutive service in joint duty positions within that immediate organization is not less than 2 years, and (5) officers who served in a joint assignment prior to 1987 that involved significant duration of not less than 12 months. 10 U.S.C. sec. 619a (b).

[13] 10 U.S.C. sec. 619a (b)(1).

promotion through one of the other four specific waivers. We analyzed the extent to which DOD has relied on this waiver category to promote its senior officers because these waivers apply most directly to the population of general and flag officers who are likely to be assigned to senior leadership positions in joint organizations.

DOD approved 185 good-of-the-service waivers, representing 11 percent of the 1,658 promotions to the general and flag officer pay grades, between fiscal years 1989 and 2001. Specifically, DOD approved 10 or more good-of-the-service waivers each year between fiscal years 1989 and 1998 and only 3 to 7 waivers in fiscal years 1999 through 2001. The Secretary of Defense has paid particular attention to this waiver category and, in 2000, established a policy that restricts the use of good-of-the-service waivers to 10 percent of total promotions to the general and flag officer pay grades each year.[14] In the 2 years since the Secretary of Defense issued limitations on the use of these waivers, DOD has used them in about 5 percent of its promotions. Our analysis of general and flag officer promotions showed that, between fiscal years 1995 and 2000, the Marine Corps used good-of-the-service waivers to promote 19 percent of its officers to brigadier general. The Army used this waiver authority for 17 percent of its promotions, and the Navy used the authority for 13 percent of its promotions. In contrast, the Air Force only requested one good-of-the-service waiver during that time period.

For most appointments to the general and flag level made after September 30, 2007, officers will have to meet the requirements expected of a joint specialty officer.[15] This means that most officers, in addition to completing a full tour of duty in a joint position, will also have to complete DOD's joint education program as well.[16] Our analysis of the 124 general and flag officers promoted in fiscal year 2001 showed that 58 officers, or 47 percent, had not fulfilled the joint specialty officer requirements. These 58 officers included 18 of 43 officers promoted in the Air Force, 18 of 40 officers promoted in the Army, 19 of 33 officers promoted in the Navy, and 3 of the 8 officers promoted in the Marine Corps.

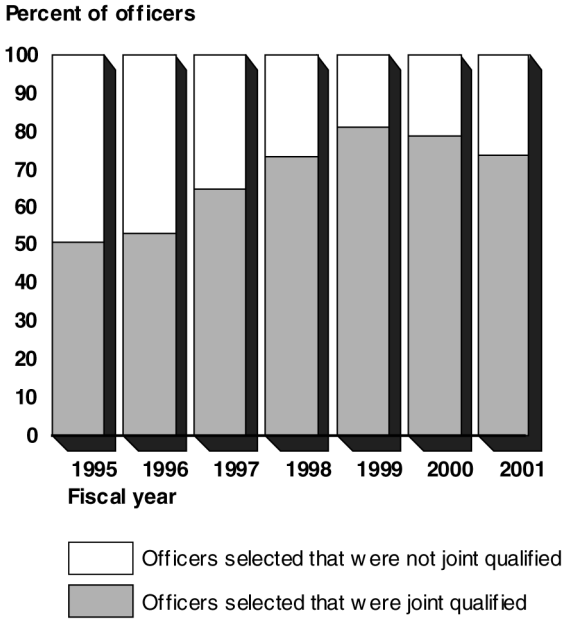
[14] Secretary of Defense memorandum dated July 6, 2000.

[15] 10 U.S.C. sec. 619a (a)(2).

[16] The existing waiver authority remains unchanged by the amendments made to 10 U.S.C. sec. 619a (a) by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002. Pub. L. 107-107, Div A, Title V, sec. 525, Dec. 28, 2001.

We also analyzed DOD's use of the four additional waiver categories. As of fiscal year 2001, DOD has been promoting more officers who had the requisite joint experience to the general and flag officer pay grades than it did in fiscal year 1995. In fiscal year 2001, however, DOD still relied on allowable waivers in lieu of joint experience to promote one in four officers to these senior pay grades. Figure 1 shows that the percentage of officers who were selected for promotion to the general and flag officer pay grades, and who had previous joint experience, rose from 51 percent in fiscal year 1995 to 80 percent in fiscal year 1999. Figure 1 also shows, however, that DOD experienced slight increases in the use of waivers in fiscal years 2000 and 2001.

Figure 1: Percentage of Officers Promoted to General or Flag Rank with Joint Experience between Fiscal Years 1995 and 2001



Source: DOD.

DOD has made progress, but is still not fully meeting provisions to promote mid-grade officers (majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels in the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps and lieutenant commanders, commanders, and captains in the Navy) who are serving or who have served in joint positions at rates not less than the promotion rates of their peers who have not served in joint positions. The Goldwater-Nichols Act

established promotion policy objectives for officers serving in pay grades O-4 and above who (1) are serving on or have served on the Joint Staff, (2) are designated as joint specialty officers, and (3) are serving or have served in other joint positions.

DOD has been most successful in meeting the promotion objective set for officers assigned to the Joint Staff. The act established an expectation that officers who are serving or have served on the Joint Staff be promoted, as a group, at a rate not less that the rate of officers who are serving or have served in their service headquarters. [17] Between fiscal years 1995 and 2001, DOD met this objective 92 percent of the time.

The act further established an expectation that joint specialty officers, as a group, be promoted at a rate not less than the rate of officers who are serving or have served in their service headquarters.[18] Between fiscal years 1995 and 2001, DOD met this promotion objective 74 percent of the time. Where DOD did not meet its promotion objective was somewhat random, and we were not able to attribute problem areas to specific pay grades or services. This standard has been temporarily reduced, and, through December 2004, DOD is required to promote joint specialty officers, as a group, at a rate not less than the rate for other officers in the same service, pay grade, and competitive category. We also compared the promotion rates of joint specialty officers against this lower standard and found that, with few exceptions, DOD would have met this standard between fiscal years 1988 and 2001.

DOD has made less significant improvement in meeting its promotion objective for officers assigned to other joint organizations.[19] The act established an expectation that officers who are serving or have served in joint positions be promoted, as a group, at a rate not less than the rate for

[17] The Goldwater-Nichols Act states that "officers who are serving on, or have served on, the Joint Staff are expected, as a group, to be promoted to the next higher grade at a rate not less than the rate for officers of the same armed force in the same grade and competitive category who are serving on, or have served on, the headquarters staff of their armed force." 10 U.S.C. sec 662 (a) (1).

[18] The Goldwater-Nichols Act states that "officers who have the joint specialty are expected, as a group, to be promoted at a rate not less than the rate for officers of the same armed force in the same grade and competitive category who are serving on, or have served on, the headquarters staff of their armed force." 10 U.S.C. sec. 662 (a)(2).

[19] This category excludes officers who have served on the Joint Staff and joint specialty officers.

all officers in their service.[20] Between fiscal years 1995 and 2001, DOD met this objective 71 percent of the time. With few exceptions during the last 7 years, all services met the promotion objective for their officers being promoted to the O-5 pay grade who are assigned to other joint organizations. However, the services have had significant difficulty meeting the promotion objectives for their officers being promoted to the O-6 pay grade. For example, the Navy has failed to meet this objective for its O-6 officers since fiscal year 1988, and the Army has only met this promotion objective twice – in fiscal years 1995 and 2001 – since fiscal year 1988. The Air Force has generally met this objective for its officers at the O-6 pay grade, but it has not met this objective in the past 4 years. Conversely, the Marine Corps had difficulty in meeting this promotion objective for its officers at the O-6 pay grade between fiscal years 1988 and 1994, but it met this objective in every year until fiscal year 2001.

Positive Actions Taken, but Gaps Remain in Education and Assignments

One of the provisions in the Goldwater-Nichols Act requires DOD to develop officers, in part, through education in joint matters.[21] Accordingly, DOD has defined joint education requirements in terms of a two-phased program in joint matters. Furthermore, the Secretary of Defense is required to educate sufficient numbers of officers so that approximately one-half of the joint positions are filled at any time by officers who have either successfully completed the joint professional education program or received an allowable waiver to complete the education after their assignment.[22] The act, however, did not identify a specific numerical requirement and, similarly, DOD has not established numerical goals concerning the number of officers who should complete joint professional military education.

According to DOD data, only one-third of the officers serving in joint positions in fiscal year 2001 had received both phases of the joint education program. This is due, in large part, to space and facility limitations at the National Defense University Schools that provide the

[20] The Goldwater-Nichols Act states that "officers who are serving in, or have served in, joint duty assignments (other than officers covered in paragraphs (1) and (2)) are expected, as a group, to be promoted to the next higher grade at a rate not less than the rate for all officers of the same armed force in the same grade and competitive category." 10 U.S.C. sec. 662 (a) (3).

[21] 10 U.S.C. sec. 661 (c).

[22] 10 U.S.C. sec. 661 (b) and (d).

second phase. Although DOD assigns approximately 3,000 active duty officers to joint positions each year, the three schools, collectively, have about 1,200 seats available for active duty officers.

Furthermore, the Joint Forces Staff College, from which most officers receive the second phase, is currently operating at 83 percent of its 906-seat capacity. Moreover, the number of unfilled seats at the Joint Forces Staff College has risen significantly in recent years, from a low of 12 empty seats in fiscal year 1998 to a high of 154 empty seats in fiscal year 2001. DOD officials cited pressing needs to assign officers to the increasing number of military operations as the major reason for these vacancies. A Joint Staff officer responsible for joint education expressed concern about the services' ability to fill seats in the future due to the ongoing war on terrorism.

Logistics, timing, and budget issues are also making it difficult for officers to attend the second phase of the joint education program. The Joint Forces Staff College offers the second phase three times during the year and, by law, may not be less than 3 months.[23] The Joint Forces Staff College can only accommodate approximately 300 students in each 3-month term and does not have the space to receive all of the service professional military education school graduates at the same time. Given that, officers can report to their joint position after completing the first phase and subsequently attend the second phase on a temporary duty basis at some point during their assignment. However, officers and senior leaders at the sites we visited told us that their joint commands cannot afford a 3-month gap in a position due to pressing schedules and workload demands. Officers serving on the Joint Staff told us that a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had instituted a policy that the Joint Staff would not send officers to the Joint Forces Staff College – or to any other training lasting more than 30 days – after they reported to the Joint Staff for duty. DOD officials confirmed this and explained that the former chairman instituted this policy with the expectation that the services would send their officers to the second phase of the education before sending them to their Joint Staff assignments. The services, however, are still not sending all officers to the second phase before they assign officers to the Joint Staff. In addition to logistics and timing issues, related budget issues exist. When an officer attends the second phase en route to a joint command, the officer's service pays the expenses associated with sending

[23] 10 U.S.C. sec. 663 (e).

the officer to the Joint Forces Staff College. When the officer attends the program midtour, the joint organization pays the expenses.

In addition, considerable variation exists among the services in terms of the number of officers each service sends to the Joint Forces Staff College. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has directed that the seats be allocated among the services in accordance with the distribution of service positions on the joint duty assignment list. The percentage of seats reserved for each service at the school does, in fact, reflect the distribution on the list. However, while the Air Force filled almost 98 percent and the Marine Corps 91 percent of their allocated seats in academic year 2001, the Army filled only 77 percent of its seats and the Navy filled only 67 percent of its seats. Moreover, vacancy rates for the Army and the Navy have, for the most part, increased between academic years 1996 and 2001.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act, as amended, further requires DOD to designate at least 800 joint positions as critical joint duty positions[24] – positions where the duties and responsibilities are such that it is highly important that officers assigned to the positions are particularly trained in, and oriented toward, joint matters. DOD has met this requirement and has designated 808 positions as critical joint duty positions. However, DOD is also required to place only joint specialty officers in these positions unless the Secretary exercises his waiver authority.[25] DOD has increasingly used its waiver authority to meet this requirement. The percentage of critical joint duty positions that were filled by officers other than joint specialty officers steadily increased from 9 percent in fiscal year 1996 to 38 percent in fiscal year 2001. This number reached an all-time high in fiscal year 2001, when DOD did not fill 311, or more than one-third, of its critical joint duty positions with joint specialty officers. In addition, DOD has left other critical joint duty positions vacant. The percentage of unfilled critical joint duty positions has steadily increased from 8 percent in fiscal year 1989 to 22 percent in fiscal year 2001. Therefore, only 331 positions, or 41 percent, of the 808 critical joint duty positions were filled by joint specialty officers in fiscal year 2001.

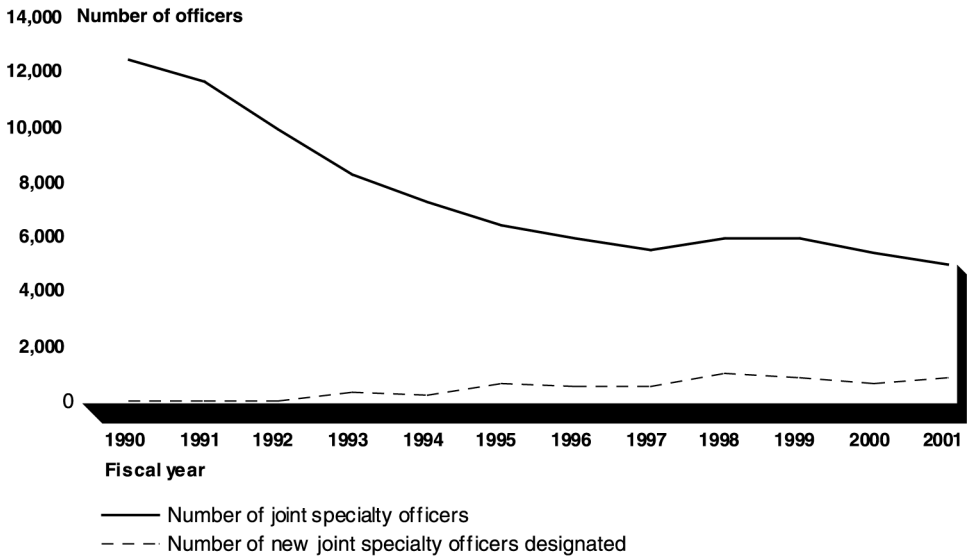
[24] The act originally required the Secretary to designate no fewer than 1,000 critical joint duty positions, but the act was amended in 1996 by Public Law 104-106 section 501(a) to reduce the number to 800. 10 U.S.C. sec. 661 (d)(2)(A).

[25] 10 U.S.C. sec. 661 (d)(2)(B) and (C).

The services fill these critical joint duty positions with officers who have both the joint specialty designation and the appropriate primary military skill, any additional required skills, and pay grade. However, when (1) no joint specialty officer with the other requisite skills is available for assignment (e.g., pay grade and military occupation) or (2) the best-qualified candidate is not a joint specialty officer, a waiver must be approved to fill the position with an otherwise qualified officer. Service and Joint Staff officials explained DOD's inability to fill a critical position with a joint specialty officer may be due to the fact that the critical joint duty position description may not reflect the commander's needs at the time the position is filled. These officials told us that the most frequently cited reason for requesting an allowable waiver was because the commander believed that the best-qualified officer for the position was not a joint specialty officer.

In addition, DOD's population of joint specialty officers may not be sufficient to meet this requirement. By fiscal year 1990, DOD had designated just over 12,400 officers, who already had the joint education and experience, as joint specialty officers. However, DOD experienced a 56 percent decrease in its joint specialty officers between fiscal years 1990 and 1997 and has experienced moderate decreases in fiscal years 2000 and 2001. By fiscal year 2001, DOD had approximately 4,900 designated joint specialty officers. Officials on the Joint Staff attributed the decreases in the early years to the fact that the attrition of officers who received the designation in fiscal year 1990 has exceeded the number of new designations of joint specialty officers. DOD officials also projected that they would need to designate approximately 800 new joint specialty officers each year to maintain its current population. Our review of data since fiscal year 1990 found that DOD only met this projection in fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2001. Figure 2 shows the number of new designations of joint specialty officers each year and the total number of joint specialty officers for fiscal years 1990 through 2001.

Figure 2: Number of Officers Designated Annually as Joint Specialty Officers and Total Number of Joint Specialty Officers for Fiscal Years 1990 through 2001



Source: The Joint Staff.

Officials told us that DOD has been selective in nominating and designating officers for the joint specialty because of the promotion objectives specified in the law. Officials noted that as a result, the population of joint specialty officers has been small. The act requires the services to promote joint specialty officers, as a group, at a rate not less than the rate of officers being promoted who are serving on, or have served on, the headquarters staff of their service.[26] This higher promotion standard is applied to joint specialty officers from the time they receive the joint specialty designation until they are considered for or promoted to pay grade O-6. DOD sought relief from this provision and, in December 2001, Congress reduced the standard for 3 years. During this 3-year period, the services are to promote joint specialty officers at a rate not less than the promotion rates of all other officers being promoted from the same military service, pay grade, and competitive category. Currently, about 2,700 officers meet the joint specialty officer qualifications but have not been designated, and DOD, given this change in the law, is in the process

[26] 10 U.S.C. sec. 662 (a)(2).

of designating these officers. Once they are designated, DOD will have a population of about 7,600 joint specialty officers.

In a letter dated January 28, 2003, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness concurred with our recommendation that DOD develop a strategic plan that links joint officer development to DOD's overall mission and goals.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have at this time.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

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