

Core Competencies: Maintaining Service Identity for Identity for Joint Effectiveness

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The term "jointness" is often used within military circles to describe something which is "good." As a term "jointness" is generally and frequently used to describe an efficient and effective military organization and/or operation. To speak of Service identity or effectiveness is more often than not considered parochial, short-sighted, or directly counter to the "good" of jointness. Although much of the criticism levied toward Service parochialism is deserved, and the Services have a substantial history of parochial maneuvering, there is a middle ground. To speak for an effective Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marine Corps should not automatically imply a statement against jointness. The need for strong and competent Services is essential to achieving effective jointness. One leads to the other, rather than replacing it. Jointness in the right areas can achieve efficiencies, however, it requires strong Services to achieve effective jointness. Service strengths must be preserved in terms of identity and core competencies.

Core competencies are those tasks which an organization does best. Within the Department of Defense the core competencies of military power reside in the Services--the Marine Corps, Navy, Army, and Air Force. These core competencies can generally be viewed through the operating medium of each Service. For example, the Marine Corps was established and has as its role amphibious operations, the Navy maritime operations and so forth. Although technology and a rapidly changing the security environment have allowed Services to develop new capabilities unrelated to their operating medium, each Service's core competency remains that for which they were first established. These defining roles give each Service its identity around which core competencies exist.

The idea of core competencies can be compared to building a house. For example, let's assume our house is at the stage of construction in which plumbers, carpenters, and electricians are all working toward completing the project. To speed up the task and ensure everyone is fully engaged the contractor assigns electricians to plumbing tasks, carpenters to electrical tasks, plumbers to carpenter tasks, and so forth. The house will likely be finished, but the misapplication of core competencies will probably manifest itself through poor carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work. Similarly, Services can take on tasks beyond their expertise, but in doing so sacrifice those skills at which they excel. The joint effort to build this house would likely have saved time and money in the short term, but these benefits are diminished by the need to equip plumbers to do carpentry, carpenters to do electrical work, and so forth.

The air medium provides an example for further discussions of Service competencies. In pushing the Services to further consolidations, criticisms have been made of "four air forces." Such comments only serve to confuse the issue and detract from the Services' abilities to remain focused on their roles. Surface forces maneuver in the air medium to achieve surface objectives. In doing so, all surface forces maintain an air component. However, this does not constitute an "air force" any more than it does a core competency. Surface forces maneuver through the air to

achieve objectives directly related to their surface objective. That is, Marines maneuver in the air to seize a beachhead, Army units maneuver in the air to achieve territorial gain, and Navy units maneuver in the air to provide security for naval operations. The Air Force maneuvers in the air, not to achieve any lesser objective but to control and exploit fully the entire third dimension. This distinction is often overlooked since the idea of exploiting air and space is a relatively novel idea in history of warfare.

The Air Force is the only Service which fully exploits the third dimension. As a benefit of this exploitation all Services can maneuver freely in the medium, allowing for responsive military force and providing the means for air power to challenge any surface target. Exploitation of the third dimension permits military force to influence strategic and operational level objectives directly without the necessity of first achieving tactical success. Whereas surface forces, even maneuvering in the third dimension, are generally oriented toward achieving more limited tactical objectives, air forces exploit the medium for broad military advantage. Moreover, surface forces pursuing a capability to exploit the third dimension often sacrifice their core competency, whether it be land, amphibious, or maritime operations. Technology has expanded the capabilities of all the Services, but technologies which intrude upon other Service competencies should be looked at critically.

Discussions about military operations frequently turn on the issue of jointness, and often fail to distinguish between operating efficiencies and operational effectiveness. Static efficiencies, that is those cost savings achieved in maintaining, training and equipping a force, can be increased through jointness. However, this does not automatically translate into greater operational effectiveness. The nation can best achieve effective military capability by maintaining Service core functions, which can then be applied in a joint manner depending on the requirements of the situation. It must not be overlooked that, by maintaining a clear focus on their core competencies, the Services provide the continuity that underpins our entire military capability. Only the Services can ensure the function of Service identity is maintained across changing political, fiscal, and security environments.

Thus in the way of general criticism, it seems the product of jointness is often confused with the purpose of jointness. Joint operations should not be considered an end unto itself, but rather a means to an end -- achieving the objectives set forth by our National Command Authorities. Our Services must be allowed to preserve their core competencies to provide a CINC with the resource base from which to select the right mission capability. Effective jointness must be regarded as a blend of core competencies providing the CINC the tools necessary to achieve assigned objectives. A totally joint force, that is, one in which Service identities are lost within Service integration, achieves efficiency at the expense of effectiveness. Attaining a totally joint force only serves to cripple Service core competencies, to reduce Service identities to the point that each Service is doing everything somewhat, but none is doing anything well. For core competencies to be preserved, the Services must be allowed to preserve what they do best. A totally joint force could actually hinder the ability of a CINC to achieve the assigned objectives.

Rather than insist upon a defense establishment that is totally integrated, we should insist upon the coordination of defined Service competencies. Jointness must not be defined simply as combined arms but rather must be defined in terms of objectives. Joint operations depend upon

the contributions of the individual Services. These roles must be defined to ensure that the competencies the Services bring to the joint battle are the ones at which the Services excel.

Joint operations are undeniably the manner in which this nation prosecutes military action. The Air Force is the air component of the joint team. Very few, if any cases could be argued for a single Service military operation. Jointness is critical and the need for joint training, exercises, doctrine and the like are undeniable. The efficiencies of consolidation and joint cooperation are attractive and contribute to the nation's well being. These things, however, must not be confused with the effectiveness of joint military operations. Effective military operations are a product of capable, competent military Services. The Services must be allowed to maintain a strong sense of identity and continue to hone the competencies they possess. A surgeon and a seamstress both use needle and thread, but very few patients would be comfortable with a seamstress closing their surgical incision. To argue that Service air components are air forces, or that surface forces should be given air roles, is equally discomfoting. One should examine seriously any joint goal which confuses efficiencies with effectiveness or which deprives the Services of their competencies.