



(U) Observations from CAPSTONE -- a Class for Newly Minted Generals and Admirals

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(U) What do "one-star" officers think of NSA? What can we learn from the military about "jointness"? An NSAer got the answers to these questions, and more...

(U) This summer I had the privilege of attending CAPSTONE, a six-week training course at National Defense University. This was perhaps the single most beneficial and engaging training opportunity I have had during my career, and I would like to share some of my experiences in it with you.

(U) CAPSTONE is a course that new [one-star general and flag officers](#) in our military services take shortly after their promotion. A result of the Goldwater-Nichols reform legislation in the 1980s that created the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it is one way of promoting unified operations among the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. Attendees in my class included over 40 newly minted generals and admirals -- including one from the Coast Guard -- as well as three civilians. The generals and admirals in the course were drawn from all military disciplines, ranging from logistics and military transport aviation to submarine skippers and battlefield commanders. A number of the officers had multiple command tours in Iraq and Afghanistan; others were from the Reserves and National Guard.

(U) Two weeks of the course took place in the DC area obtaining briefings from various Washington-area agencies, mostly from OSD (Office of the Secretary of Defense) and the services but also from State, the Intelligence Community, and Homeland Security. Four weeks were spent on the road. Two of these involved visiting US-based military commands (CENTCOM, SOUTHCOM, TRANSCOM, NORTHCOM, STRATCOM, JFCOM, and JSOC), and two were spent overseas.

(U) For the leg abroad, I joined that part of the class traveling to Asia, and visited Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, and Hawaii/PACOM. Throughout the course, we were exposed to some of the most senior policymakers in the United States Government, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Chiefs of Staff for all four military branches plus the Coast Guard, over a dozen active and retired four-stars, senior leaders from the Intelligence Community, two Cabinet secretaries, and three Ambassadors.

(U) It would be difficult to summarize all of the lessons I took away from what was an intense, in-depth training experience. Some of them, however, included the following:

- (U) **NSA generally is very highly regarded among our military customers.** There were a number of references to NSA being further ahead than others in terms of information sharing and "jointness," and quite a few instances where operational activities were cited as being based on NSA data. Those of us who work here every day know we are far from perfect, but it was gratifying to hear such complimentary views.
- (U) **The US has a very ambitious international security agenda, one that currently is straining our military capabilities considerably**, and the Army/Marines in particular. I would not understate the concern expressed in this regard. While there are plans to address this issue, the needs/resources mismatch will continue for several years at a minimum. We here need to continue to look for opportunities where information superiority can lessen the requirements-to-capabilities gap.
- (U) While international terrorism and the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan were center stage, the number of issues on our national docket that the course covered -- WMD

(Weapons of Mass Destruction); missile threats; regional instability in Asia, Africa and Latin America; failed states and ungoverned areas; pandemic disease; poverty; narcotics; etc. -- was huge and, if anything, reflected a growing agenda. **Collectively, our government's institutions lack sufficient capacity to deal with these issues effectively** (a problem reportedly exacerbated by weak interagency coordination in Washington, which we should do our part to address).

- (U) **The Intelligence Community may be 10 years behind our military services in developing a joint operational culture.** The military very clearly has embedded "jointness" into every aspect of its activities, from training and leadership development to doctrine and operational art. By contrast, we still have too much of an "us and them" attitude regarding our Intelligence Community partners (with some notable exceptions). We need to support ODNI efforts to change this, and take every opportunity to encourage "jointness" in our own work (starting with ourselves and by modifying some of our personal behaviors).
- (U) **I was incredibly impressed by the caliber of the general and flag officers in the course.** They were exceptionally well qualified and experienced, knowledgeable about world events and policy, articulate, and -- perhaps most importantly -- dedicated to their troops, their fellow citizens, and their country. If we indeed have produced the finest military in the history of the world, it would seem to me to be primarily because of the people we have recruited and trained to be its leaders. We should seek to be, and do, no less.

(U) In short, it was an absolutely terrific experience.

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