

A Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet takes on fuel from a USAF KC-135 over Iraq on Sept. 28 during a mission for Operation Inherent Resolve.

**The Joint Requirements Oversight Council makes the tough decisions on what's needed and what's affordable.**



# School of

# JRO

By Wilson Brissett, Senior Editor

**O**peration Eagle Claw—the 1980 attempt to rescue 52 American hostages held by Iran at the US Embassy in Tehran—was an utter failure. The debacle threw into sharp relief how difficult it had become for US forces to operate across service lines to accomplish a complex mission. An after-action report criticized the “ad hoc nature of the organization,” especially the military’s failure to make use of a joint structure for planning the operation.

Three years later, the invasion of Grenada—Operation Urgent Fury—again laid bare the US military’s trouble organizing itself for a joint fight.

Technically a success, the operation revealed embarrassing disconnects between the services.

In some cases, for example, commanders’ radios were incompatible.

These two operational fiascos motivated the sweeping Defense Department reorganization of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. It was in this same spirit of reforming the military’s joint structure that the Joint Requirements Oversight Council was created.

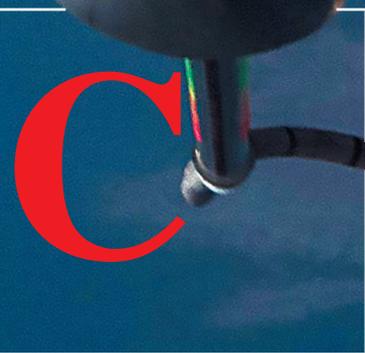
The JROC exists to achieve consensus across the services regarding acquisition priorities. Its job is to eliminate overlap and create efficiency in addressing the needs of field commanders and to give the consolidated requirements proper precedence in the Pentagon’s acquisition process.

The idea is for the JROC to balance the needs of the warfighter and the resources of the nation.

The group’s predecessor, called the Joint Requirements and Management Board, had been operating since 1984, but without the authority needed to overrule individual service chiefs.

The JROC itself was established in June 1986, four months before the passage of Goldwater-Nichols. The two headline-grabbing examples of the services not playing well together added impetus to its creation.

It was the third chairman of the council, Adm. William A. Owens, who envisioned the JROC as an authoritative body that could make the tough decisions for the joint force over the objections of individual service branch leaders, each of whom would naturally prioritize his own service. Owens’ JROC not only



worked on future programs, but turned toward existing systems to cut fat and increase interoperability.

Owens bypassed the Chiefs in the decision-making process and issued a recommendation that duplicative systems across the services be eliminated.

While his successors have often been more accommodating, Owens envisioned the JROC as a kind of joint police force for the individual services in the interest of creating a successful total military effort, and that vision has persisted.



DOD photo by TSgt. M. J. Green

Today, membership of the JROC is made up of the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who leads the council, and the Vice Chief of each service. USAF Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Stephen W. Wilson represents the Air Force. Gen. Paul J. Selva, vice chairman of the JCS and also an Air Force officer, chairs the JROC.

### A BALANCING ACT

“Keeping the US warfighter in mind is one of the most important aspects of my work for the JROC,” said Air Force Brig. Gen. David A. Krumm, deputy director for requirements with the JCS. He confirmed, though, that “the budget plays a very important part in JROC discussions” because “in an era of continued fiscal pressures, this [joint] perspective will continue to be very important.”

As such, the JROC must perform a perpetual balancing act. In the law governing its operation, the council is charged with “ensuring the consideration of trade-offs among cost, schedule, and performance objectives for joint military requirements.”

This makes the JROC a collaborative decision-making space. The top leaders from each service make the case for the systems they believe their service or the joint force needs the most, and then the group weighs the relative merits of some demands versus others.

Selva has focused on reconnecting the council with commanders in the field. During his July 2015 nomination hearing before the Senate, he said, “There’s an active effort inside the [JROC] to reinvigorate the relationship with the stakeholders who bring requirements to the table,” and he affirmed his commitment to that position.

As competitors like China and Russia modernize and advance, Selva has worked to speed up the JROC’s collaborative process.

When he arrived, decision-making on new requirements at the JROC had recently been trimmed from nine months to six months, on average. Selva is aiming to cut that time in half, so it will take only three months to move from setting a requirement to the start of an acquisition program of record.



The JROC is an arena of confrontation and critique. Each member is supposed to recognize that requirements must be trimmed and reconfigured

to meet the constraints of the DOD budget and the demanding tempo of ongoing operations.

Retired Gen. Larry O. Spencer, vice chief of staff of the Air Force from 2012 to 2015 and now president of AFA, said that at the beginning of his

JROC tenure, the process had grown to an unmanageable size.

“When I got there it was a room full of people,” Spencer recalled. “You didn’t even know who was involved.”

The sheer numbers slowed down the work of the JROC, but there were other

problems as well. Representatives of military contractors would often be present during deliberations involving their company’s programs, Spencer said, preventing a frank discussion among the principal members of the JROC. By the time Spencer retired, the JROC had begun restricting attendance, limiting the participants to a regular group much closer to the core membership of the council itself.

Early in his years with the JROC, another council member tried to persuade Spencer to adopt a go-along, get-along attitude.

### NEEDS ARE NEEDS

The colleague said, “If you don’t criticize what I need, then I won’t criticize what you need,” Spencer said. But his time on the JROC convinced him that the council works best when its members are unafraid to question each other’s arguments about which systems are truly required. “It’s my job to criticize something I think is not critical to the joint mission,” Spencer said.

This confrontational edge produces results, he believes.

But what does JROC success look like? Council decisions sit at the top of the requirements hierarchy. The Deputy’s Management Action Group (DMAG) shapes the President’s defense budget and could still refuse to fund systems that received JROC approval, however. So for Spencer, “the more effective we were in the JROC, the more impact we had in the DMAG.”

Budget concerns have a lot to do with what the JROC decides. When the council has come under fire it’s often been because of a perceived unwillingness of members to say no to each other.

The JROC “has taken on a life of its own,” then-Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.) said in a June 2014 meeting of the House Armed Services Committee. “Sometimes, just to get through the process can take more than a year. ... And it also seems to me, under JROC, that they didn’t want to pick winners and losers, and ... they’re still usually saying yes to everything.”

Sanchez, who lost her November bid for a Senate seat, might have had in mind the F-22 Raptor. Spencer



USAF photo by SSgt. Shawn Nickel



Government of Iran photo

Above left: Soldiers prepare to depart for a patrol during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada on Oct. 28, 1983, with a C-130 taking off in the background. Above: SSgt. Eugene Tabita (l) watches as SSgt. Jacob Rinker, a JTAC, coordinates close air support for soldiers during a Red Flag exercise in June. Here: A destroyed helicopter lies in the desert after the attempt to rescue 52 US Embassy staffers held captive in Tehran on April 24, 1980.



USAF photo by A1C Joseph Pick

programs that the council knows could not all be afforded, Spencer said. The most important internal rhetorical tool at the JROC's disposal, therefore, is the phrase "yeah, but," Spencer said. The vice chiefs' mandate is to faithfully transcribe the requirements communicated by the combatant commanders (this is the "yeah"), but at the same time tailor those requirements to the realities of a joint force competing for limited resources (the "but"). Spencer acknowledged this is a tough balance to strike.

It seems that progress is being made in this direction. Without offering specifics, Krumm said that as a result of

mentioned it as an example where the JROC was not successful.

The F-22 program was originally slated to produce more than 700 aircraft but was reduced in several stages. Though a number of 381 had been endorsed by the JROC, then-Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates terminated the program. The last F-22 was delivered in 2012 after only 187 operational aircraft had been produced. Gates had said the jet had no application in the war in Afghanistan and that war with China or Russia was too remote a possibility.

Unless the JROC makes tough decisions to create a balance between "what we need to be successful in war and what we can afford," Spencer said, the system won't work.

### CHIEF OF GOOD ENOUGH

Retired Vice Adm. David J. Venlet, then the former program executive officer for the F-35, made a similar point in response to Sanchez in 2014. He termed the JROC's mission as crucial. "We need somebody to be what I would call the 'chief officer of good enough,'" he said. He explained that the mission of the JROC is to find a compromise between requirements and resources without "dumbing down the requirements for our warfighters' needs."

These are "difficult decisions," Venlet went on to say, but "I believe the creation of the JROC was meant to do that," and the JROC leader then—Adm. James A. Winnifield Jr.—"has a very good view to push back on the programs."

USAF photo by TSgt. Javier Cruz



Top: Gen. Stephen Wilson (l), USAF vice chief of staff, speaks to Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, head of Air Force Special Operations Command, at Hurlburt Field, Fla. Above: An F-15 lands at Tyndall AFB, Fla., as an F-22 taxis to a parking area Dec. 12. The aircraft were participating in Checkered Flag 17-1 and Combat Archer 17-3, exercises to enhance interoperability between fourth and fifth generation aircraft.

Spencer agreed. "Every service wants the very best they can get," he said. "We all walk in there with a uniform on." But the joint nature of the JROC is intended to enable its members to transcend their commitment to individual services for the good of the total force.

It's tough, but "you have to figure out a way to take your service patch off," Spencer said.

Walking this line dominates JROC deliberations.

"It would not be responsible for us to send up a laundry list" of dream

its last review in 2015, the JROC had made changes to "make the process more deliberative."

Asking members to set aside their parochial views and see things in light of what's best for the all-around force isn't easy, especially for generals and admirals who've spent a career successfully advocating for their service's distinct needs. But when the JROC is able to do these two things, it provides crucial advice about what systems are "good enough" to win the fight and still live within the dollars available. ★