

1986: Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act

Study: Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 [Goldwater-Nichols Act] (Mark D. Sherry, *The Army Command Post and Defense Reshaping, 1987–1997*. U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2008)

Purpose: Most military reorganization efforts since World War II focused on a greater unification of the armed forces. The National Security Act of 1947 was the first major step in this process, leading to several minor reorganizations in subsequent decades. Between 1978 and the mid-1980s, the Department of Defense's (DoD) structure remained relatively stable with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) at the top. The Department of the Army, while administratively independent, was bound to both OSD and JCS by department management processes, all of which directly affected HQDA's organization and internal functions. But the relationship between OSD, HQDA, and the other service headquarters was complex and becoming unwieldy. By the mid-1980s, Congress pointed to major structural problems affecting the DoD and the Army, highlighting issues like the failed April 1980 rescue of U.S. hostages in Iran and the interoperability problems in Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada (1983). The Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, referred to as the Goldwater-Nichols Act, laid out specific corrections related to materiel acquisition; command and control of operational forces; joint strategic planning; and the Secretary of Defense's limited control over the different services.

Outcome: The Goldwater-Nichols Act significantly altered the organizational and functional relationships among HQDA and the OSD, the JCS, and the unified commands. One major outcome of the act was the strengthening of the authority wielded by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and combatant commanders over both operational and administrative issues. Congress also outlined goals regarding the strengthening of civilian authority and improving military advice; clarifying the responsibilities and authority of combatant commanders for accomplishing assigned missions; improving strategy formulation and contingency planning; enhancing joint management of officers; and increasing efficiencies in the use of resources. Title V of the act directed a reorganization of military department headquarters, forcing HQDA to reduce its personnel by 15 percent and mandating the transfer of several functions (including information management; the Army budget; research, development, and acquisition; and the Inspector General) from the Army Staff to the Secretariat. Although Congress and OSD delegated the final design of its headquarters to the Army, the language of Title V restricted options for the Army's implementation and limited HQDA's participation in operational matters.

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