

Act, which, among other things, mandated that promotion to high rank required some period of duty with a different service or with a joint (i.e., multiservice) command. This had strong and immediate effects, loosening the loyalties of senior officers to their separate services and causing them to think more broadly about the military establishment as a whole.⁹⁰ However, it also may have lessened the diversity of military advice and options presented to the president. The Goldwater-Nichols example is seen by some as having lessons applicable to lessening competition and increasing cooperation in other parts of the federal bureaucracy, particularly the law enforcement and intelligence communities.

The second, related development was a significant transfer of planning and command responsibilities from the service chiefs and their staffs to the joint and unified commands outside of Washington, especially those for Strategic Forces and for four regions: Europe, the Pacific, the Center, and the South. Posts in these commands became prized assignments for ambitious officers, and the voices of their five commanders in chief became as influential as those of the service chiefs.

Counterterrorism

The Pentagon first became concerned about terrorism as a result of hostage taking in the 1970s. In June 1976, Palestinian terrorists seized an Air France plane and landed it at Entebbe in Uganda, holding 105 Israelis and other Jews as hostages. A special Israeli commando force stormed the plane, killed all the terrorists, and rescued all but one of the hostages. In October 1977, a West German special force dealt similarly with a Lufthansa plane sitting on a tarmac in Mogadishu: every terrorist was killed, and every hostage brought back safely. The White House, members of Congress, and the news media asked the Pentagon whether the United States was prepared for similar action. The answer was no. The Army immediately set about creating the Delta Force, one of whose missions was hostage rescue.

The first test for the new force did not go well. It came in April 1980 during the Iranian hostage crisis, when Navy helicopters with Marine pilots flew to a site known as Desert One, some 200 miles southeast of Tehran, to rendezvous with Air Force planes carrying Delta Force commandos and fresh fuel. Mild sandstorms disabled three of the helicopters, and the commander ordered the mission aborted. But foul-ups on the ground resulted in the loss of eight aircraft, five airmen, and three marines. Remembered as “Desert One,” this failure remained vivid for members of the armed forces. It also contributed to the later Goldwater-Nichols reforms.

In 1983 came Hezbollah’s massacre of the Marines in Beirut. President Reagan quickly withdrew U.S. forces from Lebanon—a reversal later routinely cited by jihadists as evidence of U.S. weakness. A detailed investigation produced a list of new procedures that would become customary for forces