

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Panel on Military  
Education, Committee on Armed Services,  
House of Representatives

September 1992

# MILITARY EDUCATION

## Actions on Recommendations Involving Institute for National Strategic Studies and Capstone



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United States  
General Accounting Office  
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National Security and  
International Affairs Division

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The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman, Panel on Military Education  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your request, we have examined various issues relating to the professional military education activities at the National Defense University located at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. Specifically, this report addresses the implementation of the Panel on Military Education's recommendations to (1) establish a National Center for Strategic Studies and (2) revise the Capstone General/Flag Officer Course curriculum and length. This report is one in a series that addresses the implementation of the Panel's recommendations to improve professional military education. (See "Related GAO Products" at the end of this report.)

## Background

An objective of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 was to strengthen joint operations of the various military services. To help fulfill this objective, the House Armed Services Committee established the Panel on Military Education in November 1987 to make recommendations to improve the Department of Defense's ability to develop joint specialty officers through its professional military education systems. In its April 1989 report, the Panel recommended that the National Defense University create a National Center for Strategic Studies. The Panel envisioned it focusing on national security strategy<sup>1</sup> by engaging in research, symposia, education, and by administering Capstone—a course in national security and military strategy. Attendance at Capstone is mandated for all newly selected general and flag officers by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.

<sup>1</sup>National security strategy is the art and science of developing and using the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives. National military strategy is the art and science of employing the nation's armed forces to secure national policy objectives by applying force or the threat of force.

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Capstone's objective is to make general/flag officers more effective in planning and employing U.S. forces in joint and combined operations.<sup>2</sup> Between 32 to 35 officers attend each 6-week course taught four times a year at the National Defense University. Instead of faculty, 10 retired four-star general/flag officers participate in the course to share their experience and expertise with the students.

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## Results in Brief

The University has not established a National Center for Strategic Studies. However, the functions for such a center are being performed, not by one entity as the Panel recommended, but by several University components: the National War College, the Institute for National Strategic Studies, and the Institute for Higher Defense Studies.

Although Capstone's curriculum has been revised to reflect a greater emphasis on strategy, the course length remains unchanged from its present 6 weeks. Capstone officials stated that 6 weeks is optimal in meeting course objectives and curriculum development needs. Capstone is currently administered by the Institute of Higher Defense Studies, which is undergoing reorganization. Therefore, the eventual placement of Capstone is yet to be determined. University officials support a closer interface between Capstone and the Institute for National Strategic Studies.

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## Panel Recommendations for a National Center

The Panel recommended that the National Defense University establish a National Center for Strategic Studies, an institute whose primary focus would be on national security strategy. As described in the Panel's report, this institute would

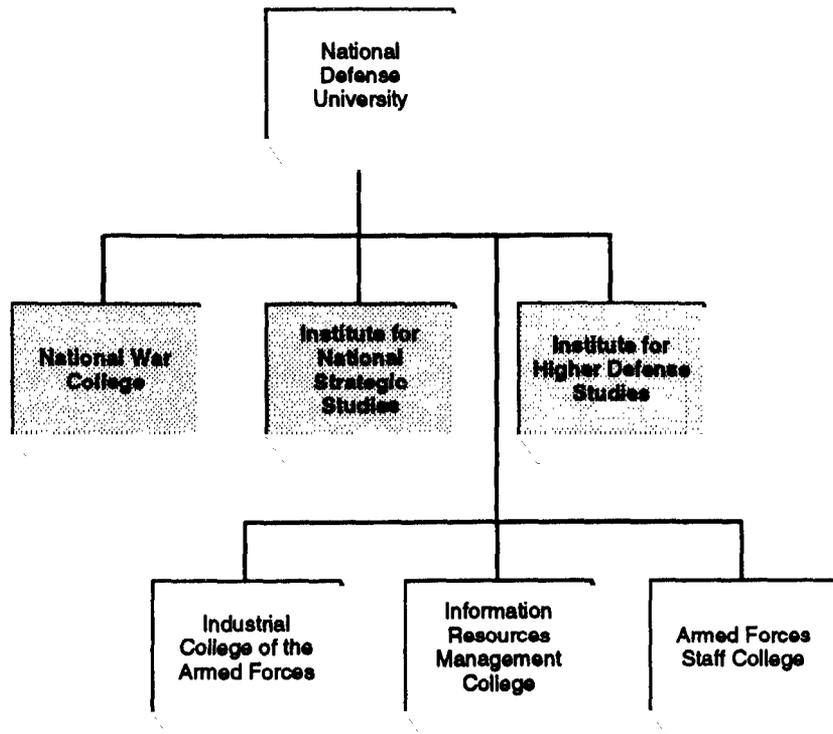
- serve as a "think tank" to research peacetime and war issues and conduct strategic studies for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), the Secretary of Defense, and civilian officials;
- conduct seminars, symposia, and workshops in strategy;
- serve as a school of national security strategy and policy for military officers and civilians; and
- educate newly selected general/flag officers through the Capstone course.

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<sup>2</sup>Joint refers to the involvement of two or more services, such as air, land, and sea; combined describes a military activity, operation, or organization composed of elements of two or more allied nations.

Such a center has not been established because, according to University officials, existing University organizations have strengthened their focus on strategy in response to the Panel's recommendations and now perform these functions. (See fig. 1 for the University's organization chart.) The Institute for National Strategic Studies is the research arm and also conducts seminars and symposia on strategy and related issues. The National War College implements the education function by offering a curriculum in national security strategy. The Institute for Higher Defense Studies administers the Capstone Course. The other schools that make up the University are the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and the Information Resources Management College, both located at Fort McNair, Washington D.C., and the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia.

Figure 1: National Defense University Organization Chart



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## Research and Symposia Functions Performed by the Institute for National Strategic Studies

The Institute for National Strategic Studies was established in 1984 and is a multidisciplinary research organization staffed by both military and civilian personnel. The Institute is responsible for conducting research, symposia, war gaming, and providing educational support to the University through teaching electives, supervising research projects, and developing curriculum. The Institute is tasked by the Secretary/Deputy Secretary of Defense as well as the Chairman/Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to support the study of joint and combined strategy, issues of security, technology, and economics, and other defense and foreign affairs topics. The Institute, described by University officials as a think tank, conducts independent policy reviews, develops new concepts, and provides long-term planning initiatives for high-level policymakers.

One recently completed research project, known as Project 2025, was initiated by the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Specifically, the Institute was tasked to forecast various global threat scenarios and the U.S. strategic posture into the year 2025. The results were briefed to the Secretary of Defense, CJCS, and the service chiefs. According to Institute officials, the study has become a significant source for planning strategy and technology development in the post-Cold War world order.

In addition, through its seminars, workshops, and symposia, the Institute provides a forum for defining and debating current national security strategy and policy issues, assessing and critiquing national policy, sharing ideas and exploring alternatives, building consensus, and testing strategic concepts in an academic environment. It also hosts three symposia each year focusing on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Pacific, and a current strategy topic. The symposia and other programs are attended by representatives from academia (including University students and faculty), U.S. and foreign government representatives, and the business community. The Institute has also established international cooperative relationships with its sister institutes in Japan, India, France, Italy, Hungary, and China. These institute-to-institute relationships enable the Institute to share its expertise with other nations in developing methods for formulating new national defense strategies and policies.

In one of its recommendations, the Panel indicated that a National Center for Strategic Studies be headed by an outstanding intellectual leader. The current Director of the Institute is a civilian and was assigned to the position in 1990. The Director held positions as the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Planning and the Chairman of the Strategy Department, Naval War College. The Director is a member of the

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National Council on the Humanities Scholar-in-Residence and has received the Heritage Foundation Distinguished Visiting Professor award.

For academic year 1991-92, the Institute faculty and staff was comprised of 37 members specializing in strategy, security, and related topics. The faculty has 10 members from the military, and the remaining 27 are civilians, including individuals from the Department of Defense and the Department of State. Institute personnel were resources for decisionmakers and media during Desert Shield/Storm. They also were major contributors in developing the President's National Security Strategy of the United States report to Congress, developments in Soviet-U.S. relations, arms control issue assessment, and Project 2025 for the Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The faculty is assigned under a renewable 3-year contract. In December 1991, the Institute was granted authority, pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 1595 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991,<sup>3</sup> allowing the conversion of all three Senior Executive Service positions to title 10 positions. University officials stated that one position has already been converted. They plan to convert one position a year until all three conversions are complete. During our review, the Institute was using title 10 to recruit one individual, and officials stated that it was working well as a recruiting incentive.

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**National War College  
Conducts Education in  
National Security Strategy**

The University conducted a review of the National War College after the Panel's 1989 report. This review resulted in curriculum revisions. In our review of the College's academic year 1991-92 curriculum, we found that it is devoted to national security strategy and policy from a joint, multiservice perspective. The 10-month course was attended by 170 students in academic year 1991-92, of whom about 75 percent were senior military officers and 25 percent were civilians.

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<sup>3</sup>Title 10, section 1595 gives the Secretary of Defense hiring authority to employ as many civilian faculty members at the National Defense University as considered necessary and to prescribe compensation levels.

## Capstone Curriculum Revised but Course Not Lengthened

In its April 1989 report, the Panel noted several shortcomings in the Capstone course. These shortcomings included inadequate focus on national security strategy, little exposure to agencies and service commands supporting national security programs, and insufficient course length. Since the Panel's review of Capstone, the curriculum has been revised, it has been approved by CJCS, and now addresses most of the Panel's concerns.

## Capstone's Increased Emphasis on Strategy

Capstone's mission is to make newly selected general and flag officers more effective in planning and employing U.S. forces in joint and combined operations, including how these operations support national strategic goals and objectives. Capstone's primary focus is national security strategy followed by national military strategy. The curriculum emphasizes formulating national security policy and developing military strategy.

We compared the content of two versions of the curriculum: the 1989 version that the Panel reviewed and the 1991 version, the most current one available. We observed an increased emphasis on strategy based on the number of strategy-related presentations. The 1989 curriculum included three presentations focusing specifically on national security and military strategy. The 1991 curriculum has substantially increased its emphasis on strategy by offering 11 such presentations.

The following presentations on strategy are examples of what the newer curriculum offers:

- Commanders in Chief's (CINC) Strategic Perspective,
- Synthesis of National/Military/Regional Security Strategy,
- Defense Policy and National Strategy,
- Joint Logistics/Warstoppers, and
- Nascent National Security Issues.

The Capstone curriculum has been revised in other areas as well. In addition to an increased focus on national security and military strategy, more hours are devoted to the crisis decision exercise that is introduced earlier in the curriculum. The first session of the exercise presents strategy and unified command<sup>4</sup> plans in the first week so that students are better prepared for their field visits to the CINCs and commands. Capstone has

<sup>4</sup>A command with a broad and continuing mission under a single commander and composed of significant assigned components of two or more services.

also increased its emphasis on joint logistics by introducing several presentations on the subject. Case studies such as Desert Shield/Desert Storm give students an historic perspective on lessons learned in joint logistics.

Classroom presentations are augmented with local, U.S., and overseas field studies. Personal interaction with senior military and civilian leaders—such as CINCs, senior commanders, and selected ambassadors—is a key component of the field studies. Discussions are held on joint planning and operations, warfighting capabilities, and current as well as future key issues facing the commands or regions. Personal interaction together with hands-on demonstrations of some warfighting equipment enables students to synthesize strategy and operations and comprehend the practical application of strategy.

Local field studies include visits to key national security agencies in the Washington area, all service headquarters, the Joint Staff, and the Department of State. Field studies within the continental United States include the U.S.-based CINCs and their senior staff. Overseas field studies broaden the focus of security concerns and nations' capabilities. Here, students meet with the overseas-based CINCs and senior leaders.

The course ends with the 1-1/2-day crisis decision exercise, or war game, in joint and combined operations. Its objective is to better enable students to make difficult, resource-constrained military decisions.

Approximately 32 to 35 newly selected general and flag officers attend each Capstone course. Since the course is offered four times a year, Capstone graduates about 128 to 140 officers annually. It is the responsibility of the individual service chiefs and the Joint Staff to assign students and ensure all eligible officers attend Capstone. Unless waived, attendance is mandatory and must occur within 2 years of Senate confirmation of promotion. According to the Capstone Director, the Secretary of Defense approves very few waivers.

Each class is comprised of a mix of services proportional to the total size of the respective service. In addition, there is always one position reserved for a Department of State foreign service officer. This individual lends the classroom a perspective on the diplomatic and political aspects of strategy and how they are linked to the military aspect. The Capstone Course Director stated that the issue of force reductions will be addressed in the near future. The Director recognizes that force reductions will have an

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impact on the number of officers being promoted to the general/flag rank, therefore affecting class size and possibly course frequency.

Capstone is taught primarily by 10 individuals referred to as senior fellows. They are retired four-star generals and admirals who once served as CINCs, service commanders, or major combined commanders. In their daily contact with the students, senior fellows act as mentors, share their professional experience and expertise, interpret events and issues, and occasionally lecture. Senior fellows usually serve a term of 5 years, although there is no minimum or maximum requirement.

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**Course Length Remains  
6 Weeks**

Capstone was originally an 11-week course and was taught once a year. The course was subsequently shortened to 6 weeks and is now taught four times a year. The Panel recommended the course length be increased from 6 weeks to reflect an increased emphasis on strategy. The course director as well as student feedback indicate that 6 weeks is the appropriate length to accomplish the educational objectives and allow adequate time for curriculum development. In addition, feedback from CINCs and the service chiefs also supports the current course length. There are no plans to increase the course length.

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**Placing Capstone Under a  
National Center for Strategic  
Studies**

The Panel recommended Capstone be placed under the auspices of a National Center for Strategic Studies given that the course focuses on national military and security strategy. Although such a Center has not been established, University officials support a closer interface between Capstone and the Institute for National Strategic Studies, the University's research arm. Currently, the Director of the Institute presents that portion of the Capstone curriculum dealing with defense policy and national strategy. In addition, the Institute's war gaming center supports Capstone's crisis decision exercise. However, another institute—the Institute for Higher Defense Studies—administers Capstone. University officials stated that the Institute for Higher Defense Studies is being reorganized due partially to military force reductions. Consequently, the eventual placement of Capstone has yet to be determined.

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## Scope and Methodology

Our review focused on selected Panel recommendations relating to a National Center for Strategic Studies and to Capstone. We determined the status of the implementation of the recommendations by interviewing appropriate officials and examining pertinent supporting documents.

In reviewing the Capstone curriculum, we compared the contents of two versions of the course materials. The first version, dated 1989, represents the curriculum at the time of the Panel's review of Capstone. The second version, dated 1991, is the most current one being taught.

We performed our review from April through June 1992 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As requested, we did not obtain written agency comments. However, we discussed a draft of this report with responsible Insitute, Capstone, and University officials and have included their comments where appropriate.

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We are sending copies of this report to other appropriate congressional committees; the Secretaries of Defense, Army, Navy, and Air Force; the Commandant of the Marine Corps; the President of the National Defense University; the Directors of the Institute for Higher Defense Studies and the Institute of National Strategic Studies; the Commandants of the joint schools; and the Commandants/Presidents of the service intermediate and senior schools. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 275-3990 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Other contributors to this report were George E. Breen, Jr., Assistant Director; Meeta Sharma, Evaluator-in-Charge; and Frank Bowers, Adviser.

Sincerely yours,



Paul L. Jones  
Director, Defense Force Management  
Issues

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# Related GAO Products

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Professional Military Education (GAO/T-NSIAD-91-4, Feb. 5, 1991).

Marine Corps: Status of Recommendations on Officers' Professional Military Education (GAO/NSIAD-91-88FS, Feb. 12, 1991).

Air Force: Status of Recommendations on Officers' Professional Military Education (GAO/NSIAD-91-122BR, Mar. 13, 1991).

Army: Status of Recommendations on Officers' Professional Military Education (GAO/NSIAD-91-121BR, Mar. 21, 1991).

Navy: Status of Recommendations on Officers' Professional Military Education (GAO/NSIAD-91-124BR, Mar. 25, 1991).

Department of Defense: Professional Military Education at the Four Intermediate Service Schools (GAO/NSIAD-91-182, June 13, 1991).

Department of Defense: Professional Military Education at the Three Senior Service Schools (GAO/NSIAD-91-202, June 20, 1991).

Military Education: Curriculum Changes at the Armed Forces Staff College (GAO/NSIAD-91-288, Sept. 19, 1991).

Military Education: Implementation of Recommendations at the Armed Forces Staff College (GAO/NSIAD-92-30, Oct. 21, 1991).

Military Education: Implementation of Recommendations at the National War College (GAO/NSIAD-92-202, June 18, 1992).

Military Education: Implementation of Recommendations at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (GAO/NSIAD-92-221, July 23, 1992).

Military Education: Issues at the National Defense University (GAO/T-NSIAD-92-46, July 23, 1992).

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