

The Joint Staff

The Joint Staff assists the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in accomplishing his responsibilities for: the unified strategic direction of the combatant forces; their operation under unified command; and for their integration into an efficient team of land, naval, and air forces. The "Joint Staff" is composed of approximately equal numbers of officers from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, and Air Force. In practice, the Marines make up about 20 percent of the number allocated to the Navy.

Since its establishment in 1947, statute has prohibited the Joint Staff from operating or organizing as an overall armed forces general staff; therefore, the Joint Staff has no executive authority over combatant forces.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after consultation with other JCS members and with the approval of the Secretary of Defense, selects the Director, Joint Staff to assist in managing the Joint Staff. By law, the direction of the Joint Staff rests exclusively with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As the Chairman directs, the Joint Staff also may assist the other JCS members in carrying out their responsibilities.

In the joint arena, a body of senior flag or general officers assists in resolving matters that do not require JCS attention. Each Service Chief appoints an operations deputy who works with the Director, Joint Staff, to form the subsidiary body known as the Operations Deputies or the OPSDEPS. They meet in sessions chaired by the Director, Joint Staff, to consider issues of lesser importance or to review major issues before they reach the Joint Chiefs of Staff. With the exception of the Director, this body is not part of the Joint Staff. There is also a subsidiary body known as the Deputy Operations Deputies (DEPOPSDEPs), composed of the Vice Director, Joint Staff, and a two-star flag or general officer appointed by each Service Chief. Currently, the DEPOPSDEPs are the Service directors for plans. Issues come before the DEPOPSDEPs to be settled at their level or forwarded to the OPSDEPS. Except for the Vice Director, Joint Staff, the DEPOPSDEPs are not part of the Joint Staff.

Matters come before these bodies under policies prescribed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Director, Joint Staff, is authorized to review and approve issues when there is no dispute between the Services, when the issue does not warrant JCS attention, when the proposed action is in conformance with CJCS policy, or when the issue has not been raised by a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Actions completed by either the OPSDEPs or DEPOPSDEPs will have the same effect as actions by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.