

# NExUS

*The essence of jointness is the intersection of national security related communities. Joint Forces Staff College describes itself as bridging the strategic and operational nexus, which is the column's inspiration and namesake. The Nexus column will draw from, analyze, and discuss the intersections—the nexuses—of disciplines, professions, and cultures, amongst other potential areas, in hopes of developing new understanding, appreciation, and perspectives. Welcome to the Nexus.*

## Doctrine as Adhesive: Teaching Students How to Manage the Dynamics of Staff Work

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Strategic guidance informs defense policy, which in turn guides the development of operational campaign and contingency plans. Moreover, the release of a National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and National Military Strategy often come with a series of articles, essays, speeches, and interviews as part of a strategic communications roll-out. In December of 2020, key joint doctrine began to change with the publication of Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning. Further, accompanying the election and swearing-in of President Biden was a first-ever Interim National Security Strategy (INSS), a document that precedes a complete National Security Strategy. At the nexus of the operational and strategic level of war, the Joint Forces Staff College anticipates changes to joint doctrine and shifts in strategic guidance to shape the curriculum in the near future. The strategies and strategic communications will shortly supersede current readings in JFSC's Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS) and Joint Combined Warfighting School (JCWS). As the interpreters of joint doctrine bridging the strategic and operational worlds, joint planners understand the dynamic nature of strategic guidance, continually assessing how operational level plans fit into the strategic picture.

Part of the dynamic and understanding how to fit operations into the strategic picture requires understanding the relationship between policies. Joint doctrine is a heuristic or a rule of thumb for planners to use to solve complex problems in the joint force. Indeed, joint doctrine provides a common language and framework for planners to communicate on joint staffs. 2020 witnessed the publication of J.P. 5-0, Joint Planning, and 2021 is expected to see a revised J.P. 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces, and J.P. 3-0, Joint Operations. Together, these three publications form the core of JCWS and JAWS doctrinal instruction. It is this joint doctrine that forms the adhesive between policy, strategy and plans at the nexus of the operational and strategic level of war.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the official policy or position of Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The baseline policy for military planners commences with the National Defense Strategy. The document informs the National Military Strategy, which then informs planning documents such as the Joint Strategic Campaign Plan (JSCP). The implications for JFSC and the faculty will be developing up-to-date instructional documents for students to guide the development of their campaign and contingency wargaming plans. Leaders on operational and strategic level staffs require a clear understanding of what guides their day-to-day activity and how to align strategies and plans across the joint force. In practice, alignment of day-to-day activities translates as a requirement to understand senior leader priorities. If doctrine is the adhesive, then senior leader priorities is the arrangement of the pieces that will adhere.

In one sense, it is the goal of Joint Forces Staff College to teach the formula for the adhesive and let the students experiment with employing it. Policy, strategy, and doctrine, much like the strategic and operational environment are dynamic, not static. Not only do they change with new administrations, but they change as new information informs senior leader's and elected official's decision-making. Just as strategy is dynamic, so too is professional military education. PME must ensure that course work is relevant and comprehensive, ensuring students who graduate depart with the right knowledge, skills, and abilities. Under that interpretation, one of the most important skills JFSC teaches is how to get unstuck from dogmatic and unhelpful patterns of thinking that don't support senior leader demands.